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Time, Space, and the Evolution of Afro-American Society on British Mainland North America

IRA BERLIN

TIME AND SPACE ARE THE USUAL BOUNDARIES of historical inquiry. The last generation of slavery studies in the United States has largely ignored these critical dimensions but has, instead, been preoccupied with defining the nature of American slavery, especially as compared with racial bondage elsewhere in the Americas. These studies have been extraordinarily valuable not only in revealing much about slave society but also in telling a good deal about free society. They have been essential to the development of a new understanding of American life centered on social transformation: the emergence of bourgeois society in the North with an upward-striving middle class and an increasingly self-conscious working class and the development of a plantocracy in the South with a segmented social order and ideals of interdependence, stability, and hierarchy. But viewing Southern slavery from the point of maturity, dissecting it into component parts, comparing it to other slave societies, and juxtaposing it to free society have produced an essentially static vision of slave culture. This has been especially evident in the studies of Afro-American life. From Stanley M. Elkins's *Sambo* to John W. Blassingame's Nat-Sambo-Jack typology, scholars of all persuasions have held time constant and ignored the influence of place. Even the most comprehensive recent interpretation of slave life, Eugene D. Genovese's *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, has been more concerned with explicating the dynamic of the patriarchal ideal in the making of Afro-American culture than in explaining its development in time and space. None of the histories written since World War II has equaled the temporal and spatial specificity of U. B. Phillips's *American Negro Slavery*.¹

Earlier versions of this essay were presented at the Conference on Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in the New World, held in New York, May 1976, at the Ninth World Congress of Sociology, held in Uppsala, Sweden, August 1978, and at the Symposium on the Slave Trade, held in Petersburg, Virginia, October 1979. In addition to the commentators at these conferences, I am grateful to Stanley Engerman, Eric Foner, Eugene D. Genovese, Herbert G. Gutman, Ronald Hoffman, Philip Morgan, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, and Armstead Robinson for their critical comments and suggestions. Much of the research for this essay was done while I was a fellow at the Davis Center for Historical Studies. I would especially like to thank the center's director, Lawrence Stone, for his support and intellectual comradery.

¹ Stanley Elkins, *Slavery: A Problem in American Institutional and Intellectual Life* (Chicago, 1959); John W. Blassingame, *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1972); Eugene D. Genovese, *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made* (New York, 1974); and Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York, 1918). For a historical perspective on post-World War II scholarship on slavery, see David Brion

Recent interest in the beginnings of slavery on the mainland of British North America, however, has revealed a striking diversity in Afro-American life. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, three distinct slave systems evolved: a Northern nonplantation system and two Southern plantation systems, one around Chesapeake Bay and the other in the Carolina and Georgia lowcountry. Slavery took shape differently in each with important consequences for the growth of black culture and society. The development of these slave societies depended upon the nature of the slave trade and the demographic configurations of blacks and whites as well as upon the diverse character of colonial economy. Thus, while cultural differences between newly arrived Africans and second and third generation Afro-Americans or creoles² everywhere provided the basis for social stratification within black society, African-creole differences emerged at different times with different force and even different meaning in the North, the Chesapeake region, and the lowcountry.³ A careful examination of the diverse development of Afro-American culture in the colonial era yields important clues for an understanding of the full complexity of black society in the centuries that followed.

THE NATURE OF SLAVERY AND THE DEMOGRAPHIC BALANCE of whites and blacks during the seventeenth and first decades of the eighteenth centuries tended to incorporate Northern blacks into the emerging Euro-American culture, even as

Davis, "Slavery and the Post-World War II Historians," *Daedalus*, 103 (1974): 1-16; and, on the importance of temporal change, see Herbert G. Gutman, "Slave Culture and Slave Family and Kin Network: The Importance of Time," *South Atlantic Urban Studies*, 2 (1978): 73-88.

² I have used these terms synonymously. Both are mined with difficulties. "Afro-American" has recently come into common usage as a synonym for "black" and "Negro" in referring to people of African descent in the United States. Although "creole" generally refers to native-born peoples, it has also been applied to people of partly European, but mixed racial and national, origins in various European colonies. In the United States, "creole" has also been specifically applied to people of mixed but usually non-African origins in Louisiana. Staying within the bounds of the broadest definition of "creole" and the literal definition of "Afro-American," I have used both terms to refer to black people of native American birth.

³ As used in this essay, the concept of acculturation or creolization does not mean the liquidation of a culture, only its transformation. African culture transported to the New World was not lost or destroyed but transformed. The transformation of Africans to Afro-Americans entailed the joining together of a variety of distinctive African cultures as well as the compounding of those cultures with various European and native American ones to create a new cultural type: the Afro-American. Scholars have only begun to study the making of Afro-American culture; therefore, any judgment about its nature and the process of its creation must be tentative and incomplete. I would emphasize that "Africans" and "creoles" as used here do not represent autonomous categories, if for no other reason than African and creole people were connected by ties of blood and kinship. Instead, these categories are used as two poles within a range of an historical experience that was varied and overlapping. The process of creolization was not always synchronized with generational change. Beginning with Melville J. Herskovits's *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York, 1941), scholars have produced a wide-ranging theoretical literature on the question of cultural transformation of African people in the New World. For some that have been most useful for this essay, see Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *An Anthropological Approach to the Caribbean Past* (Philadelphia, 1976); Melville J. Herskovits, "Problem, Method, and Theory in Afro-American Studies," *Phylon*, 7 (1946): 337-54; M. G. Smith, *The Plural Society in the British West Indies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965), and "The African Heritage in the Caribbean," in Vera Rubin, ed., *Caribbean Studies* (Seattle, 1960), 34-45; H. Orlando Patterson, "Slavery, Acculturation, and Social Change: The Jamaican Case," *British Journal of Sociology*, 17 (1966): 151-64; and Edward Brathwaite, *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770-1820* (London, 1971), and "Caliban, Ariel, and Unprospero in the Conflict of Creolization: A Study of the Slave Revolt in Jamaica in 1831-32," in Vera Rubin and Arthur Tuden, eds., *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies*, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, no. 292 (New York, 1977), 41-62.

whites denied them a place in Northern society.⁴ But changes in the character of the slave trade during the middle third of the eighteenth century gave new impetus to African culture and institutions in the Northern colonies. By the American Revolution, Afro-American culture had been integrated into the larger Euro-American one, but black people remained acutely conscious of their African inheritance and freely drew on it in shaping their lives.

Throughout the colonial years, blacks composed a small fraction of the population of New England and the Middle Colonies. Only in New York and Rhode Island did they reach 15 percent of the population. In most Northern colonies the proportion was considerably smaller. At its height, the black population totaled 8 percent of the population of New Jersey and less than 4 percent in Massachusetts and Connecticut. But these colony-wide enumerations dilute the presence of blacks and underestimate the importance of slave labor. In some of the most productive agricultural regions and in the cities, blacks composed a larger share of the population, sometimes constituting as much as one-third of the whole and perhaps one-half of the work force.⁵ Although many Northern whites never saw a black slave, others had daily, intimate contact with them. And, although some blacks found it difficult to join together with their former countrymen, others lived in close contact.

The vast majority of Northern blacks lived and worked in the countryside. A few labored in highly capitalized rural industries—tanneries, salt works, and iron furnaces—where they often composed the bulk of the work force, skilled and unskilled. Iron masters, the largest employers of industrial slaves, also were often the largest slaveholders in the North. Pennsylvania iron masters manifested their dependence on slave labor when, in 1727, they petitioned for a reduction in the tariff on slaves so they might keep their furnaces in operation. Bloomeries and forges in other colonies similarly relied on slave labor.⁶ But in an overwhelmingly agrarian society only a small proportion of the slave population engaged in industrial labor.

Like most rural whites, most rural blacks toiled as agricultural workers. In southern New England, on Long Island, and in northern New Jersey, which contained the North's densest black populations, slaves tended stock and raised crops for export to the sugar islands. Farmers engaged in provisioning the West Indies with draft animals and foodstuffs were familiar with slavery and had easy

⁴ In the discussion of the Chesapeake region and the lowcountry, scholars have employed the term "Anglo-American" to refer to the culture of white people. Because of the greater diversity of origins of white peoples in the Middle Colonies, the term "Euro-American" seems more applicable to white culture in the North.

⁵ For a collection of the relevant censuses, see William S. Rossiter, *A Century of Population Growth* (Washington, 1909), 149–84. Also see Robert V. Wells, *The Population of the British Colonies in America before 1776: A Survey of Census Data* (Princeton, 1975), 69–143, and Wells's correction of the 1731 enumeration, "The New York Census of 1731," *New York Historical Society Quarterly*, 57 (1973): 255–59. For estimates of the Northern black population predating these censuses, see U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States, Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington, 1960), 756.

⁶ Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1973), 42–43; Charles S. Boyer, *Early Forges and Furnaces in New Jersey* (Philadelphia, 1963), 30–31, 149, 166, 194–99, 239; Frances D. Pigeon, "Slavery in New Jersey on the Eve of the Revolution," in Williams C. Wright, ed., *New Jersey in the American Revolution* (rev. ed., Trenton, N.J., 1974), 51–52, 57; Darold D. Wax, "The Demand for Slave Labor in Colonial Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania History*, 34 (1967): 334–35; and William Binning, *Pennsylvania Iron Manufacture in the Eighteenth Century* (Harrisburg, Pa., 1931), 122–25.

access to slaves. Some, like the Barbadian émigrés in northern New Jersey, had migrated from the sugar islands. Others, particularly those around Narragansett Bay, styled themselves planters in the West Indian manner. They built great houses, bred race horses, and accumulated slaves, sometimes holding twenty or more bondsmen. But, whatever the aspirations of this commercial gentry, the provisioning trade could not support a plantation regime. Most slaves lived on farms (not plantations), worked at a variety of tasks, and never labored in large gangs. No one in the North suggested that agricultural labor could be done only by black people, a common assertion in the sugar islands and the Carolina low-country. In northern New England, the Hudson Valley, and Pennsylvania, the seasonal demands of cereal farming undermined the viability of slavery. For most wheat farmers, as Peter Kalm shrewdly observed, "a Negro or black slave requires too much money at one time," and they relied instead on white indentured servants and free workers to supplement their own labor. Throughout the North's bread basket, even those members of the gentry who could afford the larger capital investment and the concomitant risk that slave ownership entailed generally depended on the labor of indentured servants more than on that of slaves. Fully two-thirds of the bond servants held by the wealthiest farmers in Lancaster and Chester counties, Pennsylvania, were indentured whites rather than chattel blacks. These farmers tended to view their slaves more as status symbols than as agricultural workers. While slaves labored in the fields part of the year, as did nearly everyone, they also spent a large portion of their time working in and around their masters' houses as domestic servants, stable keepers, and gardeners. Significantly, the wills and inventories of Northern slaveholders listed their slaves with other high status objects like clocks and carriages rather than with land or agricultural implements.⁷

The distinct demands of Northern agriculture shaped black life in the countryside. Where the provisioning trade predominated, black men worked as stock minders and herdsman while black women labored as dairy maids as well as domestics of various kinds. The large number of slaves demanded by the provisioning trade and the ready access to horses and mules it allowed placed black companionship within easy reach of most bondsmen. Such was not always true in the cereal region. Living scattered throughout the countryside on the largest farms and working in the house as often as in the field, blacks enjoyed neither the mobility nor the autonomy of slaves employed in the provisioning trade. But, if the demands of Northern agriculture affected black life in different ways, almost all rural blacks lived and worked in close proximity to whites. Slaves

⁷ Kalm, *Peter Kalm's Travels in North America*, ed. and trans. A. B. Benson, 1 (New York, 1937): 205, as quoted in Alan Tully, "Patterns of Slaveholding in Colonial Pennsylvania: Chester and Lancaster Counties, 1729-1758," *Journal of Social History*, 6 (1973): 286; Lorenzo J. Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England* (New York, 1942), 103-12; McManus, *Black Bondage in the North*, 40-41; Pigeon, "Slavery in New Jersey," 51; William D. Miller, "The Narragansett Planters," *American Antiquarian Society Proceedings*, 43 (1933): 67-71; Tully, "Patterns of Slaveholding in Colonial Pennsylvania," 284-303; Steven B. Frankt, "Patterns of Slave-Holding in Somerset County, N.J.," seminar paper, 1967, in Special Collections, Rutgers University Library, New Brunswick, N.J.; Wax, "The Demand for Slave Labor in Colonial Pennsylvania," 332-40; and Jerome H. Woods, Jr., "The Negro in Early Pennsylvania: The Lancaster Experience, 1730-1790," in Elinor Miller and Eugene D. Genovese, eds., *Plantation, Town, and County: Essays on the Local History of American Slave Society* (Urbana, Ill., 1974), 447-48.

quickly learned the rudiments of the English language, the Christian religion, the white man's ways. In the North, few rural blacks remained untouched by the larger forces of Euro-American life.

Northern slaves were also disproportionately urban. During the eighteenth century, a fifth to a quarter of the blacks in New York lived in New York City. Portsmouth and Boston contained fully a third of the blacks in New Hampshire and Massachusetts, and nearly half of Rhode Island's black population resided in Newport. Ownership of slaves was almost universal among the urban elite and commonplace among the middling classes as well. On the eve of the Revolution, nearly three-fourths of Boston's wealthiest quartile of propertyholders ranked in the slaveholding class. Fragmentary evidence from earlier in the century suggests that urban slave-ownership had been even more widespread but contracted with the growth of a free working class. Viewed from the top of colonial society, the observation of one visitor that there was "not a house in Boston" that did "not have one or two" slaves might be applied to every Northern city with but slight exaggeration.⁸

Urban slaves generally worked as house servants—cooking, cleaning, tending gardens and stables, and running errands. They lived in back rooms, lofts, closets, and, occasionally, makeshift alley shacks. Under these cramped conditions, few masters held more than one or two slaves. However they might cherish a large retinue of retainers, urban slaveholders rarely had the room to lodge them. Because of the general shortage of space, masters discouraged their slaves from establishing families in the cities. Women with reputations for fecundity found few buyers, and some slaveholders sold their domestics at the first sign of pregnancy. A New York master candidly announced the sale of his cook "because she breeds too fast for her owners to put up with such inconvenience," and others gave away children because they were an unwarranted expense. As a result, black women had few children, and their fertility ratio was generally lower than that of whites. The inability or unwillingness of urban masters to support large households placed a severe strain on black family life.⁹ But it also encouraged masters to allow their slaves to live out, hire their own time, and thereby gain a measure of independence and freedom.

Slave hirelings along with those bondsmen owned by merchants, warehouse

⁸ N. B. Shurtleff *et al.*, eds., *Records of the Governor and Company of Massachusetts Bay in New England (1628–1698)*, 1 (Boston, 1853): 79, as quoted in Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in the Wilderness, 1625–1742* (New York, 1938), 49; Rossiter, *A Century of Population Growth*, 149–84; Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*, 78, 81–82, 84–88, 92–93; Gary B. Nash, "Slaves and Slaveowners in Colonial Philadelphia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 30 (1973): 226–52; and Thomas Archdeacon, *New York City, 1664–1710: Conquest and Change* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1976), 46–47.

⁹ New York *Weekly Post-Boy*, May 17, 1756, as quoted in McManus, *Black Bondage in the North*, 38; Carl Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt, 1743–1776* (New York, 1955), 88, 285–86, and *Cities in the Wilderness*, 163, 200–01; Nash, "Slaves and Slaveowners in Colonial Pennsylvania," 243–44; Archdeacon, *New York City*, 89–90; Rossiter, *A Century of Population Growth*, 170–80; Edgar J. McManus, *A History of Slavery in New York* (Syracuse, N.Y., 1966), 44–45, and *Black Bondage in the North*, 37–39; and Wells, *The Population in the British Colonies of America before 1776*, 116–23. The low ratio of women to children may have been the result of high child mortality as well as low fertility. In 1788, J. P. Brissot de Warville observed, "Married Negroes certainly have as many children as whites, but it has been observed that in the cities the death rate of Negro children is higher"; Brissot de Warville, *New Travels in the United States of America, 1788*, ed. Durand Echeverria (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), 232n.

keepers, and ship chandlers kept Northern cities moving. Working outside their masters' houses, these bondsmen found employment as teamsters, wagoners, and stockmen on the docks and drays and in the warehouses and shops that composed the essential core of the mercantile economy. In addition, many slaves labored in the maritime trades not only as sailors on coasting vessels, but also in the rope walks, shipyards, and sail factories that supported the colonial maritime industry. Generally, the importance of these slaves to the growth of Northern cities increased during the eighteenth century. Urban slavery moved steadily away from the household to the docks, warehouses, and shops, as demonstrated by the growing disproportion of slave men in the urban North. Aside from those skills associated with the maritime trades, however, few slaves entered artisan work. Only a handful could be found in the carriage trades that enjoyed higher status and that offered greater opportunity for an independent livelihood and perhaps the chance to buy freedom.¹⁰

In the cities as in the countryside, blacks tended to live and work in close proximity to whites. Northern slaves not only gained first-hand knowledge of their masters' world, but they also rubbed elbows with lower-class whites in taverns, cock fights, and fairs where poor people of varying status mingled.¹¹ If urban life allowed slaves to meet more frequently and enjoy a larger degree of social autonomy than did slavery in the countryside, the cosmopolitan nature of cities speeded the transformation of Africans to Afro-Americans. Acculturation in the cities of the North was a matter of years, not generations.

For many blacks, the process of cultural transformation was well under way before they stepped off the boat. During the first century of American settlement, few blacks arrived in the North directly from Africa. Although American slavers generally originated in the North, few gave priority to Northern ports. The markets to the south were simply too large and too lucrative. Slaves dribbled into the Northern colonies from the West Indies or the mainland South singly, in twos and threes, or by the score but rarely by the boatload. Some came on special order from merchants or farmers with connections to the West Indian trade. Others arrived on consignment, since few Northern merchants specialized in selling slaves. Many of these were the unsalable "refuse" (as traders contemptuously called them) of larger shipments. Northern slaveholders generally disliked these scourgings of the transatlantic trade who, the governor of Massachusetts observed, were "usually the worst servants they have"; they feared that the West Indian re-exports had records of recalcitrance and criminality as well as physical defects. In time, some masters may have come to prefer seasoned slaves because of their knowledge of English, familiarity with work routines, or resistance to New World diseases. But, whatever their preference, Northern colonies could not compete with the wealthier staple-producing colonies for prime African field hands. Before the 1740s, Africans appear to have

¹⁰ Nash, "Slaves and Slaveowners in Colonial Philadelphia," 248–52; Archdeacon, *New York City*, 89–90, esp. 89 n. 16; Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*, 111–18; and Bridenbaugh, *Cities in Revolt*, 88, 274, 285–86.

¹¹ Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York, 1976), 48–56.

arrived in the North only when a temporary glut made sale impossible in the West Indies and the mainland South. Even then they did not always remain in the North. When conditions in the plantation colonies changed, merchants re-exported them for a quick profit. The absence of direct importation during the early years and the slow, random, haphazard entry of West Indian creoles shaped the development of black culture in the Northern colonies.¹² While the nature of the slave trade prevented the survival of tribal or even shipboard ties that figured so prominently in Afro-American life in the West Indies and the Lower South, it better prepared blacks to take advantage of the special circumstances of their captivity.

Newly arrived blacks, most already experienced in the New World and familiar with their proscribed status, turned Northern bondage to their advantage where they could. They quickly established a stable family life and, unlike newly imported Africans elsewhere on the continent, increased their numbers by natural means during the first generation. By 1708, the governor of Rhode Island observed that the colony's slaves were "supplied by the offspring of those they have already, which increase daily. . . ." The transplanted creoles also seized the opportunities provided by the complex Northern economy, the relatively close ties of master and slave, and, for many, the independence afforded by urban life. In New Amsterdam, for example, the diverse needs of the Dutch mercantile economy induced the West India Company, the largest slaveholder in the colony, to allow its slaves to live out and work on their own in return for a stipulated amount of labor and an annual tribute. "Half-freedom," as this system came to be called, enlarged black opportunities and allowed for the development of a strong black community. When the West India Company refused to make these privileges hereditary, "half-free" slaves organized and protested, demanding that they be allowed to pass their rights to their children. Failing that, New Amsterdam slaves pressed their masters in other ways to elevate their children's status. Some, hearing rumors that baptism meant freedom, tried to gain church membership. A Dutch prelate complained that these blacks "wanted nothing else than to deliver their children from bodily slavery, without striving for piety and Christian virtues." Even after the conquering English abolished "half-freedom" and instituted a more rigorous system of racial servitude, blacks continued to use the leverage gained by their prominent role in the city's economy to set standards of treatment well above those in the plantation colonies. Into the eighteenth century, New York slaves informally enjoyed the rights of an earlier era, including the right to hold property of their own. "The

¹² W. N. Sainsbury *et al.*, eds., *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, 1708-1709*, 110, as quoted in Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*, 35; McManus, *Black Bondage in the North*, 18-25, and *Slavery in New York*, 23-39; James G. Lydon, "New York and the Slave Trade, 1700 to 1774," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 35 (1978): 275-79, 381-90; Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*, 15-45; and Darold D. Wax, "Negro Imports into Pennsylvania, 1720-1766," *Pennsylvania History*, 32 (1965): 254-87, and "Preferences for Slaves in Colonial America," *Journal of Negro History*, 58 (1973): 374-76, 379-87. So many of the slaves entering the North were re-exports from other parts of the Americas that Philip D. Curtin has not included the North in his calculation of the African population transported to the New World; see *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, Wisc., 1969), 143.

Customs of this Country," bristled a frustrated New York master to a West Indian friend, "will not allow us to use our Negroes as you do in Barbados."¹³

Throughout the North, the same factors that mitigated the harshest features of bondage in New York strengthened the position of slaves in dealing with their masters. Small holdings, close living conditions, and the absence of gang labor drew masters and slaves together. A visitor to Connecticut noted in disgust that slaveowners were "too Indulgent (especially the farmers) to their Slaves, suffering too great a familiarity from them, permitting them to sit at Table and eat with them (as they say to save time) and into the dish goes the black hoof as freely as the white hand." Slaves used knowledge gained at their masters' tables to press for additional privileges: the right to visit friends, live with their families, or hire their own time. One slaveholder reluctantly cancelled the sale of his slaves because of "an invariable indulgence here to permit Slaves of any kind of worth or Character who must change Masters, to choose those Masters," and he could not persuade his slaves "to leave their Country (if I may call it so), their acquaintances & friends."¹⁴ Such indulgences originated not only in the ability of slaves to manipulate their masters to their own benefit, but also from the confidence of slaveholders in their own hegemony. Surety of white dominance, derived from white numerical superiority, complemented the blacks' understanding of how best to bend bondage to their own advantage and to maximize black opportunities within slavery.

DURING the middle decades of the eighteenth century, the nature of Northern slavery changed dramatically. Growing demand for labor, especially when European wars limited the supply of white indentured servants and when depression sent free workers west in search of new opportunities, increased the importance of slaves in the work force. Between 1732 and 1754, blacks composed fully a third of the immigrants (forced and voluntary) arriving in New York. The new importance of slave labor changed the nature of the slave trade. Merchants who previously took black slaves only on consignment now began to import them directly from Africa, often in large numbers. Before 1741, for example, 70 percent of the slaves arriving in New York originated in the West Indies and other mainland sources and only 30 percent came directly from Africa. After that date, the proportions were reversed. Specializing in the slave trade, African slavers carried many times more slaves than did West Indian traders. Whereas slaves had earlier arrived in small parcels rarely numbering more than a half-

¹³ Governor Samuel Cranston to the Board of Trade, December 5, 1708, in J. R. Bartlett, ed., *Records of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations*, 4 (1860): 55, as quoted in Miller, "Narragansett Planters," 68 n. 2; and Cadwallader Colden to Mr. Jordan, March 26, 1717, in *Letters and Papers of Cadwallader Colden*, 1 (New York, 1917): 39, as quoted in Arthur Zilversmit, *The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Negro Slavery in the North* (Chicago, 1967), 22. Joyce D. Goodfriend, "Burghers and Blacks: The Evolution of a Slave Society at New Amsterdam," *New York History*, 59 (1978): 125-44; McManus, *Slavery in New York*, 2-22; and Gerald F. DeJong, "The Dutch Reformed Church and Negro Slavery in Colonial America," *Church History*, 40 (1971): 430.

¹⁴ Sara Kemble Knight, as quoted in Ralph F. Weld, *Slavery in Connecticut* (New Haven, 1935), 8-9; John Watts, *Letterbook of John Watts*, New York Historical Society Collections, no. 61 (New York, 1938), 151; and McManus, *Black Bondage in the North*, *passim*.

dozen, direct shipments from Africa at times now totaled over a hundred and, occasionally, several times that. Slaves increasingly replaced white indentured servants as the chief source of unfree labor not only in the areas that had produced for the provisioning trade, where their pre-eminence had been established earlier in the century, but in the cities as well. In the 1760s, when slave importation into Pennsylvania peaked, blacks composed more than three-quarters of Philadelphia's servant population.¹⁵

Northern whites generally viewed this new wave of slaves as substitutes for indentured labor. White indentured servants had come as young men without families, and slaves were now imported in much the same way. "For this market they must be young, the younger the better if not quite children," declared a New York merchant. "Males are best." As a result, the sex ratio of the black population, which earlier in the century had been roughly balanced, suddenly swung heavily in favor of men. In Massachusetts, black men outnumbered black women nearly two to one. Elsewhere sex ratios of 130 or more became commonplace.¹⁶ Such sexual imbalance and the proscription of interracial marriage made it increasingly difficult for blacks to enjoy normal family lives. As the birth rate slipped, mortality rates soared, especially in the cities where newly arrived blacks appeared to be concentrated. Since most slaves came without any previous exposure to New World diseases, the harsh Northern winters took an ever higher toll. Blacks died by the score; the crude death rate of Philadelphia and Boston blacks in the 1750s and 1760s was well over sixty per thousand, almost double that of whites.¹⁷ In its demographic outline, Northern slavery at mid-century often bore a closer resemblance to the horrors of the West Indies during the height of a sugar boom than to the relatively benign bondage of the earlier years.

Whites easily recovered from this demographic disaster by again switching to European indentured servants and then to free labor as supplies became available, and, as the influx of slaves subsided, black life also regained its balance. But the transformation of Northern slavery had a lasting influence on the development of Afro-American culture. Although the Northern black population remained predominantly Afro-American after nearly a century of slow importation from the West Indies and steady natural increase, the direct entry of Africans into Northern society reoriented black culture.

Even before the redirection of the Northern slave trade, those few Africans in the Northern colonies often stood apart from the creole majority. While Afro-American slaves established precedents and customs, which they then drew upon to improve their condition, Africans tended to stake all to recapture the

¹⁵ Nash, "Slaves and Slaveowners in Colonial Philadelphia," 226-37; Lydon, "New York and the Slave Trade," 387-88; and Darold D. Wax, "Quaker Merchants and the Slave Trade in Colonial Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 86 (1962): 145, and "Negro Imports into Pennsylvania," 256-57, 280-87.

¹⁶ Watts, *Letterbook of John Watts*, 31; McManus, *Black Bondage in the North*, 38-39; Wax, "Preferences for Slaves in Colonial America," 400-01; Rossiter, *A Century of Population Growth*, 149-84; and Greene, *The Negro in Colonial New England*, 93-96.

¹⁷ Nash, "Slaves and Slaveowners in Colonial Philadelphia," 232-41, esp. n. 46.

world they had lost. Significantly, Africans, many of whom did not yet speak English and still carried tribal names, composed the majority of the participants in the New York slave insurrection of 1712, even though most of the city's blacks were creoles.¹⁸ The division between Africans and Afro-Americans became more visible as the number of Africans increased after mid-century. Not only did creoles and Africans evince different aspirations, but their life-chances—as reflected in their resistance to disease and their likelihood of establishing a family—also diverged sharply. Greater visibility may have sharpened differences between creoles and Africans, but Africans were too few in number to stand apart for long. Whatever conflicts different life-chances and beliefs created, whites paid such distinctions little heed in incorporating the African minority into their slaveholdings. The propensity of Northern whites to lump blacks together mitigated intraracial differences. Rather than permanently dividing blacks, the entry of Africans into Northern society gave a new direction to Afro-American culture.¹⁹

Newly arrived Africans reawakened Afro-Americans to their African past by providing direct knowledge of West African society. Creole blacks began to combine their African inheritance into their own evolving culture. In some measure, the easy confidence of Northern whites in their own dominance speeded the syncretization of African and creole culture by allowing blacks to act far more openly than slaves in the plantation colonies. Northern blacks incorporated African culture into their own Afro-American culture not only in the common-place and unconscious way that generally characterizes the transit of culture but also with a high degree of consciousness and deliberateness. They designated their churches “African,” and they called themselves “Sons of Africa.”²⁰ They adopted African forms to maximize their freedom, to choose their leaders, and, in general, to give shape to their lives. This new African influence was manifested most fully in Negro election day, a ritual festival of role reversal common throughout West Africa and celebrated openly by blacks in New England and a scattering of places in the Middle Colonies.

The celebration of Negro election day took a variety of forms, but everywhere it was a day of great merrymaking that drew blacks from all over the countryside. “All the various languages of Africa, mixed with broken and ludicrous English, filled the air, accompanied with the music of the fiddle, tambourine, the banjo, [and] drum,” recalled an observer of the festival in Newport. Negro election day culminated with the selection of black kings, governors, and judges. These officials sometimes held symbolic power over the whole community and real power over the black community. While the black governors held court, ad-

¹⁸ Kenneth Scott, “The Slave Insurrection in New York in 1712,” *New York Historical Society Quarterly*, 45 (1961): 43–74, esp. 62–67.

¹⁹ The shortage of African women and a sexual balance among Indians and, to a lesser extent, whites that favored women encouraged black men to marry Indian and, occasionally, white women, especially in New England; Winthrop D. Jordan, “American Chiaroscuro: The Status and Definition of Mulattoes in the British Colonies,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 19 (1962): 197–98, esp. n. 28.

²⁰ For petitions by blacks, see Robert C. Twombly, “Black Resistance to Slavery in Massachusetts,” in William L. O’Neill, ed., *Insights and Parallels* (Minneapolis, 1973), 13–16; and, for various association names, see Dorothy Porter, ed., *Early Negro Writings, 1760–1837* (Boston, 1971).

judicating minor disputes, the blacks paraded and partied, dressed in their masters' clothes and mounted on their masters' horses. Such role reversal, like similar status inversions in Africa and elsewhere, confirmed rather than challenged the existing order, but it also gave blacks an opportunity to express themselves more fully than the narrow boundaries of slavery ordinarily allowed. Negro election day permitted a seeming release from bondage, and it also provided a mechanism for blacks to recognize and honor their own notables. Most important, it established a framework for the development of black politics. In the places where Negro election day survived into the nineteenth century, its politics shaped the politics within the black community and merged with partisan divisions of American society. Slaves elsewhere in the New World also celebrated this holiday, but whites in the plantation colonies found the implications of role reversal too frightening to allow even symbolically. Northern whites, on the other hand, not only aided election day materially but sometimes joined in themselves. Still, white cooperation was an important but not the crucial element in the rise of Negro election day. Its origin in the 1740s and 1750s suggests how the entry of Africans reoriented Afro-American culture at a formative point in its development.²¹

African acculturation in the Northern colonies at once incorporated blacks into American society and sharpened the memory of their African past and their desire to preserve it. While small numbers and close proximity to whites forced blacks to conform to the forms of the dominant Euro-American culture, the confidence of whites in their own hegemony allowed black slaves a good measure of autonomy. In this context it is not surprising that a black New England sea captain established the first back-to-Africa movement in mainland North America.²²

UNLIKE AFRICAN ACCULTURATION IN THE NORTHERN COLONIES, the transformation of Africans into Afro-Americans in the Carolina and Georgia lowcountry was a slow, halting process whose effects resonated differently within black society. While creolization created a unified Afro-American population in the North, it left lowcountry blacks deeply divided. A minority lived and worked in close proximity to whites in the cities that lined the rice coast, fully conversant with the most cosmopolitan sector of lowland society. A portion of this urban elite, increasingly light-skinned, pressed for further incorporation into white society, confident they could compete as equals. The mass of black people, however, remained physically separated and psychologically estranged from the Anglo-American world and culturally closer to Africa than any other blacks on continental North America.

²¹ Henry Bull, "Memoir of Rhode Island," Newport *Rhode-Island Republican*, April 19, 1837, as quoted in William D. Pierson, "Afro-American Culture in Eighteenth-Century New England" (Ph.D. dissertation, Indiana University, 1975), 181; Joseph P. Reidy, "'Negro Election Day' and Black Community Life in New England, 1750-1860," *Marxist Perspectives*, 1 (1978): 102-17; Alice M. Earle, *Colonial Days in Old New York* (5th ed., New York, 1922); Woods, "The Negro in Early Pennsylvania," 451; and Pierson, "Afro-American Culture in Eighteenth-Century New England," 181-313.

²² Peter Williams, *A Discourse, Delivered in the Death of Capt. Paul Cuffee* (New York, 1817).

The sharp division was not immediately apparent. At first it seemed that African acculturation in the Lower South would follow the Northern pattern. The first blacks arrived in the lowcountry in small groups from the West Indies. Often they accompanied their owners and, like them, frequently immigrated in small family groups. Many had already spent considerable time on the sugar islands, and some had doubtless been born there. Most spoke English, understood European customs and manners, and, as their language skills and family ties suggest, had made the difficult adjustment to the conditions of black life in the New World.

As in the Northern colonies, whites dominated the population of the pioneer Carolina settlement. Until the end of the seventeenth century, they composed better than two-thirds of the settlers. During this period and into the first years of the eighteenth century, most white slaveholders engaged in mixed farming and stock raising for export to the West Indian islands where they had originated. Generally, they lived on small farms, held few slaves, and worked closely with their bond servants. Even when they hated and feared blacks and yearned for the prerogatives of West Indian slave masters, the demands of the primitive, labor-scarce economy frequently placed master and slave face-to-face on opposite sides of a sawbuck.²³ Such direct, equalitarian confrontations tempered white domination and curbed slavery's harshest features.

White dependence on blacks to defend their valuable lowland beachhead reinforced this "sawbuck equality." The threat of invasion by the Spanish and French to the south and Indians to the west hung ominously over the lowcountry during its formative years. To bolster colonial defenses, officials not only drafted slaves in time of war but also regularly enlisted them into the militia. In 1710 Thomas Nairne, a knowledgeable Carolina Indian agent, observed that "enrolled in our Militia [are] a considerable Number of active, able, Negro Slaves; and Law gives every one of those his freedom, who in Time of an Invasion kills an Enemy." Between the settlement of the Carolinas and the conclusion of the Yamasee War almost fifty years later, black soldiers helped fend off every military threat to the colony. Although only a handful of slaves won their freedom through military service, the continued presence of armed, militarily experienced slaves weighed heavily on whites. During the Yamasee War, when the governor of Virginia demanded one Negro woman in return for each Virginia soldier sent to defend South Carolina, the beleaguered Carolinians rejected the offer, observing that it was "impracticable to Send Negro Women in their Roomes by reason of the Discontent such Usage would have given their husbands to have their wives taken from them which might have occasioned a Revolt."²⁴

²³ Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion* (New York, 1974), 13–24, 94–97. The image is derived from an account of a French refugee living near the Santee River who reported in 1697 that "he worked many days with a Negro man at the Whip saw"; Alexander S. Salley, ed., "Journal of General Peter Horry," *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 38 (1937): 51–52, as quoted in *ibid.*, 97.

²⁴ Memorial of Joseph Boone and Richard Beresford to the Lord Commissioners of Trade and Plantations, December 6, 1716, Public Record Office, London, as quoted in Clarence L. Ver Steeg, *Origins of a Southern Mosaic: Studies of Early Carolina and Georgia* (Athens, Ga., 1975), 106; Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial*

The unsettled conditions that made the lowcountry vulnerable to external enemies strengthened the slave's hand in other ways. Confronted by an overbearing master or a particularly onerous assignment, many blacks took to the woods. Truancy was an easy alternative in the thinly settled, heavily forested lowcountry. Forest dangers generally sent truant slaves back to their owners, but the possibility of another flight induced slaveholders to accept them with few questions asked. Some bondsmen, however, took advantage of these circumstances to escape permanently. Maroon colonies existed throughout the lowland swamps and into the backcountry. Maroons lived a hard life, perhaps more difficult than slaves, and few blacks chose to join these outlaw bands. But the ease of escape and the existence of a maroon alternative made masters chary about abusing their slaves.²⁵

The transplanted African's intimate knowledge of the subtropical lowland environment—especially when compared to the Englishman's dense ignorance—magnified white dependence on blacks and enlarged black opportunities within the slave regime. Since the geography, climate, and topography of the lowcountry more closely resembled the West African than the English countryside, African not European technology and agronomy often guided lowland development. From the first, whites depended on blacks to identify useful flora and fauna and to define the appropriate methods of production. Blacks, adapting African techniques to the circumstances of the Carolina wilderness, shaped the lowland cattle industry and played a central role in the introduction and development of the region's leading staple. In short, transplanted Englishmen learned as much or more from transplanted Africans as did the former Africans from them.²⁶ While whites eventually appropriated this knowledge and turned it against black people to rivet tighter the bonds of servitude, white dependence on African know-how operated during those first years to place blacks in managerial as well as menial positions and thereby permitted blacks to gain a larger share of the fruits of the new land than whites might otherwise allow. In such circumstances, white domination made itself felt, but both whites and blacks incorporated much of West African culture into their new way of life.

The structure of the fledgling lowland economy and the demands of stock raising, with deerskins as the dominant "crop" during the initial years of settlement, allowed blacks to stretch white military and economic dependence into generous grants of autonomy. On the small farms and isolated cowpens (hardly plantations by even the most latitudinous definition), rude frontier conditions permitted only perfunctory supervision and the most elementary division of labor. Most units were simply too small to employ overseers, single out specialists, or benefit from the economies of gang labor. White, red, and black laborers of varying legal status worked shoulder to shoulder, participating in the dullest

South Carolina, 124–30; Ver Steeg, *Origins of a Southern Mosaic*, 105–07; and Verner W. Crane, *The Southern Frontier, 1670–1732* (Durham, N.C., 1928), 162–81.

²⁵ John D. Duncan, "Servitude and Slavery in Colonial South Carolina, 1670–1776" (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1971), 587–601; and Herbert Aptheker, "Maroons within the Present Limits of the United States," *Journal of Negro History*, 24 (1939): 167–84.

²⁶ Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina*, 35–62, 119–30.

drudgery as well as the most sophisticated undertakings. Rather than skilled artisans or prime field hands, most blacks could best be characterized as jacks-of-all-trades. Since cattle roamed freely through the woods until fattened for market, moreover, black cowboys—suggestively called “cattle chasers”—moved with equal freedom through the countryside, gaining full familiarity with the terrain.²⁷ The autonomy of the isolated cowpen and the freedom of movement stock raising allowed made a mockery of the total dominance that chattel bondage implied. Slaves set the pace of work, defined standards of workmanship, and divided labor among themselves, doubtless leaving a good measure of time for their own use. The insistence of many hard-pressed frontier slaveowners that their slaves raise their own provisions legitimated this autonomy. By law, slaves had Sunday to themselves. Time allowed for gardening, hunting, and fishing both affirmed slave independence and supplemented the slave diet. It also enabled some industrious blacks to produce a small surplus and to participate in the colony’s internal economy, establishing an important precedent for black life in the lowcountry.²⁸

Such independence burdened whites. They complained bitterly and frequently about blacks traveling unsupervised through the countryside, congregating in the woods, and visiting Charles Town to carouse, conspire, or worse. Yet knowledge of the countryside and a willingness to take the initiative in hunting down cattle or standing up to Spaniards were precisely the characteristics that whites valued in their slaves. They complained but they accepted. Indeed, to resolve internal disputes within their own community, whites sometimes promoted black participation in the affairs of the colony far beyond the bounds later permitted slaves or even black freemen. “For this last election,” grumbled several petitioners in 1706, “Jews, Strangers, Sailors, Servants, Negroes, & almost every French Man in Craven & Berkly County came down to elect, & their votes were taken.”²⁹ Such breaches of what became an iron law of Southern racial policy suggest how the circumstances of the pioneer lowcountry life shrank the social as well as the cultural distance between transplanted Africans and the *mélange* of European settlers. During the first generations of settlement, Afro-American and Anglo-American culture and society developed along parallel lines with a large degree of overlap.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 28–34; Converse D. Clowse, *Economic Beginnings of Colonial South Carolina, 1670–1730* (Columbia, S.C., 1971), 61; Crane, *The Southern Frontier, 1670–1732*, 91, 120, 163, 184–85; Ver Steeg *Origins of a Southern Mosaic*, 114–16; Gary S. Dunbar, “Colonial Carolina Cowpens,” *Agricultural History*, 35 (1961): 125–30; and David L. Coon, “The Development of Market Agriculture in South Carolina, 1670–1785” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, 1972), 113–14, 134–37. Georgia developed later than South Carolina; a description of an isolated cowpen in the Georgia countryside in 1765 may, therefore, suggest practices of an earlier era in South Carolina. See Harold E. Davis, *The Fledgling Province: Social and Cultural Life in Colonial Georgia, 1733–1776* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1976), 67–68.

²⁸ Frank J. Klingberg, *An Appraisal of the Negro in Colonial South Carolina* (Washington, 1941), 6–7; Klaus G. Leowald, Beverly Starika, and Paul S. Taylor, trans. and eds., “Johann Martin Bolzius Answers a Questionnaire on Carolina and Georgia,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 14 (1957): 235–36, 256; Thomas Cooper and David J. McCord, comps., *The Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, 10 vols. (Columbia, S.C., 1836–41), 7: 404; and Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina*, 62. For black participation in the internal economy of the sugar islands, see Sidney W. Mintz, *Caribbean Transformations* (Chicago, 1974), esp. chap. 7.

²⁹ “The Representation and Address of Several Members of This Present Assembly,” in William James Rivers, *A Sketch of the History of South Carolina* (Charleston, S.C., 1856), 459, as quoted in Ver Steeg, *Origins of a Southern Mosaic*, 38 (italics removed); and Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina*, 102–03.

If the distinction between white and black culture remained small in the lowcountry, so too did differences within black society. The absence of direct importation of African slaves prevented the emergence of African-creole differences; and, since few blacks gained their liberty during those years, differences in status within the black community were almost nonexistent. The small radius of settlement and the ease of water transportation, moreover, placed most blacks within easy reach of Charles Town. A "city" of several dozen rude buildings where the colonial legislature met in a tavern could hardly have impressed slaves as radically different from their own primitive quarters. Town slaves, for their part, doubtless had first-hand familiarity with farm work as few masters could afford the luxury of placing their slaves in livery.³⁰

Thus, during the first years of settlement, black life in the lowcountry, like black life in the North, evolved toward a unified Afro-American culture. Although their numbers combined with other circumstances to allow Carolina blacks a larger role in shaping their culture than that enjoyed by blacks in the North, there remained striking similarities in the early development of Afro-American life in both regions. During the last few years of the seventeenth century, however, changes in economy and society undermined these commonalities and set the development of lowcountry Afro-American life on a distinctive course.

THE discovery of exportable staples, first naval stores and then rice and indigo, transformed the lowcountry as surely as the sugar revolution transformed the West Indies. Under the pressure of the riches that staple production provided, planters banished the white yeomanry to the hinterland, consolidated small farms into large plantations, and carved new plantations out of the malaria-ridden swamps. Before long, black slaves began pouring into the region and, sometime during the first decade of the eighteenth century, white numerical superiority gave way to the lowcountry's distinguishing demographic characteristic: the black majority.

Black numerical dominance grew rapidly during the eighteenth century. By the 1720s, blacks outnumbered whites by more than two to one in South Carolina. In the heavily settled plantation parishes surrounding Charles Town, blacks enjoyed a three to one majority. That margin grew steadily until the disruptions of the Revolutionary era, but it again increased thereafter. Georgia, where metropolitan policies reined planter ambition, remained slaveless until mid-century. Once restrictions on slavery were removed, planters imported blacks in large numbers, giving lowland Georgia counties considerable black majorities.³¹

Direct importation of slaves from Africa provided the impetus to the growth

³⁰ Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina*, 99–103, 157, 159.

³¹ Peter H. Wood, " 'More like a Negro Country': Demographic Patterns in Colonial South Carolina, 1670–1740," in Stanley L. Engerman and Eugene D. Genovese, eds., *Race and Slavery in the Western Hemisphere: Quantitative Studies* (Princeton, 1975), 131–45; Julian J. Petty, *The Growth and Distribution of Population in South Carolina* (Columbia, S.C., 1943), 15–58, 220–27; Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States*, 756; and *Returns of the Whole Number of Persons within the . . . United States [1790]* (Philadelphia, 1791).

of the black majority. Some West Indian Afro-Americans continued to enter the lowcountry, but they shrank to a small fraction of the whole.³² As African importation increased, Charles Town took its place as the largest mainland slave mart and the center of the lowland slave trade. Almost all of the slaves in Carolina and later in Georgia—indeed, fully 40 percent of all pre-Revolutionary black arrivals in mainland North America—entered at Charles Town. The enormous number of slaves allowed slave masters a wide range of choices. Lowcountry planters developed preferences far beyond the usual demands for healthy adult and adolescent males and concerned themselves with the regional and tribal origins of their purchases. Some planters may have based their choices on long experience and a considered understanding of the physical and social character of various African nations. But, for the most part, these preferences were shallow ethnic stereotypes. Coromantees revolted; Angolans ran away; Iboes destroyed themselves. At other times, lowland planters apparently preferred just those slaves they did not get, perhaps because all Africans made unsatisfactory slaves and the unobtainable ones looked better at a distance. Although lowcountry slave masters desired Gambian people above all others, Angolans composed a far larger proportion of the African arrivals. But, however confused or mistaken in their beliefs, planters held them firmly and, in some measure, put them into practice. “Gold Coast and Gambia’s are the best, next to them the Windward Coast are prefer’d to Angola’s,” observed a Charles Town merchant in describing the most salable mixture. “There must not be a Callabar amongst them.”³³ Planter preferences informed lowcountry slave traders and, to a considerable degree, determined the tribal origins of lowland blacks.

Whatever their origins, rice cultivation shaped the destiny of African people arriving at Charles Town. Although the production of pitch and tar played a pivotal role in the early development of the staple-based economy in South Carolina, rice quickly became the dominant plantation crop. Rice cultivation evolved slowly during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as planters, aided by knowledgeable blacks, mastered the complex techniques necessary for commercial production. During the first half of the eighteenth century, rice culture was limited to the inland swamps, where slave-built dikes controlled the irrigation of low-lying rice fields. But by mid-century planters had discovered how to regulate the tidal floods to irrigate and drain their fields. Rice production moved to the tidal swamps that lined the region’s many rivers and expanded greatly. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the rice coast stretched from Cape Fear in North Carolina to the Satilla River in Georgia.³⁴ Throughout the lowcountry, rice was king.

³² W. Robert Higgins, “Charleston: Terminus and Entrepôt of the Colonial Slave Trade,” in Martin L. Kilson and Robert I. Rotberg, eds., *The African Diaspora* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976), 115.

³³ Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina*, xiv, and “‘More like a Negro Country,’” 149–54; Higgins, “Charleston: Terminus and Entrepôt of the Colonial Slave Trade,” 118–27; Wax, “Preferences for Slaves in Colonial America,” 388–99; Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, 143, 156–57; and Henry Laurens, *The Papers of Henry Laurens*, ed. Philip M. Hamer, George C. Rogers, Jr., and David R. Chesnut, 7 vols. (Columbia, S.C., 1970–), 1: 294–95. For a continuing discussion of slave preferences in the lowcountry, see Laurens, *Papers of Henry Laurens*, esp. vols. 1–3.

³⁴ Clowse, *Economic Beginnings of Colonial South Carolina*, 122–33, 167–71, 220–21, 231–35, 256–58; Wood, *Black*

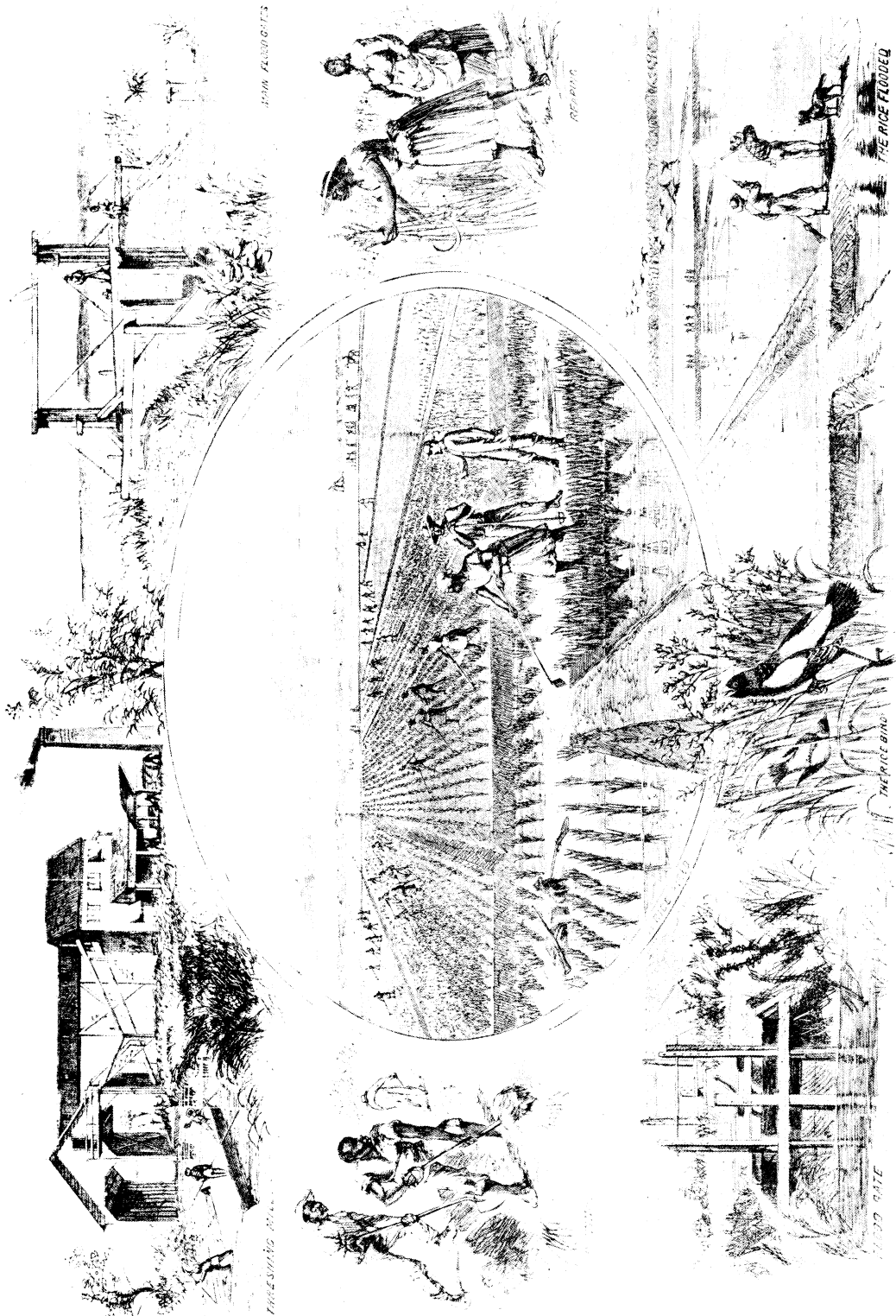


Figure 1: Mid-nineteenth-century representation of the processes of rice production. With the exception of the steam mill in the upper left-hand corner, the processes depicted here had not changed from the colonial era. Photograph taken from *Harper's Weekly*, January 5, 1867.

The relatively mild slave regime of the pioneer years disappeared as rice cultivation expanded. Slaves increasingly lived in large units, and they worked in field gangs rather than at a variety of tasks. The strict requirements of rice production set the course of their work. And rice was a hard master. For a large portion of the year, slaves labored knee deep in brackish muck under the hot tropical sun; and, even after the fields were drained, the crops laid-by, and the grain threshed, there were canals to clear and dams to repair. By mid-century planters had also begun to grow indigo on the upland sections of their estates. Indigo complemented rice in its seasonal requirements, and it made even heavier labor demands.³⁵ The ready availability of African imports compounded the new harsh realities of plantation slavery by cheapening black life in the eyes of many masters. As long as the slave trade remained open, they skimmed on food, clothing, and medical attention for their slaves, knowing full well that substitutes could be easily had. With the planters' reliance on male African imports, slaves found it increasingly difficult to establish and maintain a normal family life. Brutal working conditions, the disease-ridden, lowland environment, and the open slave trade made for a deadly combination. Slave birth rates fell steadily during the middle years of the eighteenth century and mortality rates rose sharply. Between 1730 and 1760, deaths outnumbered births among blacks and only African importation allowed for continued population growth. Not until the eve of the Revolution did the black population begin again to reproduce naturally.³⁶

As the lowcountry plantation system took shape, the great slave masters retreated to the cities of the region; their evacuation of the countryside was but another manifestation of the growing social and cultural distance between them and their slaves. The streets of Charles Town, and, later, of Beaufort, Georgetown, Savannah, Darien, and Wilmington sprouted great new mansions as planters fled the malarial lowlands and the black majority. By the 1740s, urban life in the lowcountry had become attractive enough that men who made their fortunes in rice and slaves no longer returned home to England in the West Indian tradition. Instead, through intermarriage and business connections, they began to weave their disparate social relations into a close-knit ruling class, whose self-consciousness and pride of place became legendary. Charles Town, as the capital of this new elite, grew rapidly. Between 1720 and 1740 its population

Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina, 35–62; Lewis C. Gray, *History of Agriculture in the Southern United States to 1860*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1933), 1: 277–89; James M. Clifton, "Golden Grains of White: Rice Planting on the Lower Cape Fear," *North Carolina Historical Review*, 50 (1973): 368–78; Douglas C. Wilms, "The Development of Rice Culture in 18th-Century Georgia," *Southeastern Geographer*, 12 (1972): 45–57; and Coon, "Market Agriculture in South Carolina," 126–27, 168–69, 178–86, 215–68. For the importance of naval stores in the transformation, see Ver Steeg, *Origins of a Southern Mosaic*, 117–32.

³⁵ For excellent descriptions of the process of rice growing and its changing technology, see David Doar, *Rice and Rice Planting in the Carolina Low Country* (Charleston, S.C., 1936), 7–41; and Gray, *Agriculture in the Southern United States*, 1: 290–97.

³⁶ Wood, "'More like a Negro Country,'" 153–64; and Philip D. Morgan, "Afro-American Cultural Change: The Case of Colonial South Carolina Slaves," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians, held in New Orleans, April 1979, 3–6, esp. tables 1, 4, 7. In the 1760s, as blacks began to increase naturally, slaveholders began to show some concern for their slaves' family life; see Laurens, *Papers of Henry Laurens*, 4: 595–96, 625, 5: 370.

doubled, and it nearly doubled again by the eve of the Revolution to stand at about twelve thousand. With its many fine houses, its great churches, its shops packed with luxury goods, Charles Town's prosperity bespoke the maturation of the lowland plantation system and the rise of the planter class.³⁷

Planters, ensconced in their new urban mansions, their pockets lined with the riches rice produced, ruled their lowcountry domains through a long chain of command: stewards located in the smaller rice ports, overseers stationed near or on their plantations, and plantation-based black drivers. But their removal from the plantation did not breed the callous indifference of West Indian absenteeism. For one thing, they were no more than a day's boat ride away from their estates. Generally, they resided on their plantations during the non-malarial season. Their physical removal from the direct supervision of slave labor and the leisure their urban residences afforded appear to have sharpened their concern for "their people" and bred a paternalist ideology that at once legitimated their rule and informed all social relations.³⁸

The lowcountry plantation system with its urban centers, its black majority, its dependence on "salt-water" slaves transformed black culture and society just as it reshaped the white world. The unified Afro-American culture and society that had evolved during the pioneer years disappeared as rice cultivation spread. In its place a sharp division developed between an increasingly urban creole and a plantation-based African population. The growth of plantation slavery not only set blacks further apart from whites, it also sharply divided blacks.

One branch of black society took shape within the bounds of the region's cities and towns. If planters lived removed from most slaves, they maintained close, intimate relations with some. The masters' great wealth, transient life, and seasonal urban residence placed them in close contact with house servants who kept their estates, boatmen who carried messages and supplies back and forth to their plantations, and urban artisans who made city life not only possible but comfortable. In addition, coastal cities needed large numbers of workers to transport and process the plantation staples, to serve the hundreds of ships that annually visited the lowcountry, and to satisfy the planters' newly acquired taste for luxury goods. Blacks did most of this work. Throughout the eighteenth century they composed more than half the population of Charles Town and other lowcountry ports. Probably nothing arrived or left these cities without some black handling it. Black artisans also played a large role in urban life. Master craftsmen employed them in every variety of work. A visitor to Charles Town

³⁷ George C. Rogers, Jr., *Charleston in the Age of the Pinckneys* (Norman, Okla., 1969); Carl Bridenbaugh, *Myths and Realities* (Baton Rouge, 1952), 59–60, 76–94, and *Cities in Revolt*, 216; and Frederick P. Bowes, *The Culture of Early Charleston* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1942).

³⁸ Eugene D. Genovese has not made either regional or temporal distinctions in the development of Southern ideology but has leaned heavily on South Carolina for his understanding of Southern paternalism; see his *Roll, Jordan, Roll*, 1–113. For the interplay of quasi-absenteeism and planter ideology in the nineteenth century, see William W. Freehling, *Prelude to Civil War: The Nullification Controversy in South Carolina, 1813–1836* (New York, 1966), 65–70; and Michael P. Johnson, "Planters and Patriarchy: A Family History of Planter Ideology, Charleston, South Carolina," *Journal of Southern History* (forthcoming). The degree of absenteeism and its effect on social relations between planters and slaves has yet to be explored.

found that even barbers “are supported in idleness & ease by their negroes . . . ; & in fact many of the mechaniks bear nothing more of their trade than the name.” Although most black artisans labored along the waterfront as shipwrights, ropemakers, and coopers, lowcountry blacks—unlike blacks in Northern cities—also entered the higher trades, working as gold beaters, silversmiths, and cabinetmakers. In addition, black women gained control over much of the marketing in the lowcountry ports, mediating between slave-grown produce in the countryside and urban consumption. White tradesmen and journeymen periodically protested against slave competition, but planters, master craftsmen, and urban consumers who benefited from black labor and services easily brushed aside these objections.³⁹

Mobile, often skilled, and occasionally literate, urban slaves understood the white world. They used their knowledge to improve their position within lowcountry society even while the condition of the mass of black people deteriorated in the wake of the rice revolution. Many urban creoles not only retained the independence of the earlier years but enlarged upon it. They hired their own time, earned wages from “overwork,” kept market stalls, and sometimes even opened shops. Some lived apart from their masters and rented houses of their own, paying their owners a portion of their earnings in return for *de facto* freedom. Such liberty enabled a few black people to keep their families intact and perhaps even accumulate property for themselves. The small black communities that developed below the Bluff in Savannah and in Charles Town’s Neck confirm the growing independence of urban creoles.⁴⁰

The incongruous prosperity of urban bondsmen jarred whites. By hiring their own time, living apart from their masters, and controlling their own family life, these blacks forcibly and visibly claimed the white man’s privileges. Perhaps no aspect of their behavior was as obvious and, hence, as galling as their elaborate dress. While plantation slaves—men and women—worked stripped to the waist wearing no more than loin cloths (thereby confirming the white man’s image of savagery), urban slaves appropriated their masters’ taste for fine clothes and often the clothes themselves. Lowcountry legislators enacted various sumptuary regulations to restrain the slaves’ penchant for dressing above their station. The

³⁹ Joseph W. Barnwell, ed., “The Diary of Timothy Ford,” *South Carolina Historical Magazine*, 13 (1914): 142; Alexander Hewatt, *An Historical Account of the Rise and Progress of the Colonies of South Carolina and Georgia*, 2 (London, 1779): 97; Alan Candler, ed., *The Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, 18 (Atlanta, 1912): 277–82; Charles S. Henry, comp., *A Digest of All the Ordinances of Savannah* (Savannah, Ga., 1854), 94–97; Petition from Charleston Carpenters and Bricklayers, 1783, and Petition from Charleston Coopers, 1793, Legislative Papers, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia; Cooper and McCord, *Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, 2: 22–23, 7: 385–87, 9: 692–97; Donald R. Lennon and Ida B. Kellam, eds., *The Wilmington Town Book, 1743–1778* (Raleigh, N.C., 1973), 165–66; Petition from Newberne, 1785, North Carolina Legislative Papers, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh; Carl Bridenbaugh, *Colonial Craftsmen* (New York, 1950) 139–41, and *Cities in Revolt*, 88–89, 244, 274, 285–86; Leila Sellers, *Charleston Business on the Eve of the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1934), 99–108; Duncan, “Servitude and Slavery in Colonial South Carolina,” 439–46; and Kenneth Coleman, *Colonial Georgia, A History* (New York, 1976), 229–30.

⁴⁰ Candler, *Colonial Records of the State of Georgia*, 23–30, 252–62; Henry, *Ordinances of Savannah*, 95–97; Alexander Edwards, comp., *Ordinances of the City Council of Charleston* (Charleston, S.C., 1802), 65–68; Cooper and McCord, *Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, 7: 363, 380–81, 393; Lennon and Kellam, *The Wilmington Town Book*, xxx–xxxi, 165–68, 204–05; Duncan, “Servitude and Slavery in Colonial South Carolina,” 467–69, 481–84; and Sellers, *Charleston Business on the Eve of the American Revolution*, 99–102, 106–08.

South Carolina Assembly once even considered prohibiting masters from giving their old clothes to their slaves. But hand-me-downs were clearly not the problem as long as slaves earned wages and had easy access to the urban marketplace. Frustrated by the realities of urban slavery, lawmakers passed and re-passed the old regulations to little effect. On the eve of the Revolution, a Charles Town Grand Jury continued to bemoan the fact that the "Law for preventing the excessive and costly Apparel of Negroes and other Slaves in this province (especially in *Charles Town*) [was] not being put into Force."⁴¹

Most of these privileged bondsmen appear to have been creoles with long experience in the New World. Although some Africans entered urban society, the language skills and the mastery of the complex interpersonal relations needed in the cities gave creoles a clear advantage over Africans in securing elevated positions within the growing urban enclaves. To be sure, their special status was far from "equal." No matter how essential their function or intimate their interaction, their relations with whites no longer smacked of the earlier "sawbuck equality." Instead, these relations might better be characterized as paternal, sometimes literally so.

Increasingly during the eighteenth century, blacks gained privileged positions within lowcountry society as a result of intimate, usually sexual, relations with white slave masters. Like slaveholders everywhere, lowland planters assumed that sexual access to slave women was simply another of the master's prerogatives. Perhaps because their origin was West Indian or perhaps because their dual residence separated them from their white wives part of the year, white men established sexual liaisons with black women frequently and openly. Some white men and black women formed stable, long-lasting unions, legitimate in everything but law. More often than other slaveholders on continental British North America, lowcountry planters recognized and provided for their mulatto offspring, and, occasionally, extended legal freedom. South Carolina's small free Negro population, almost totally confined to Charles Town, was largely the product of such relations. Light-skinned people of color enjoyed special standing in the lowcountry ports, as they did in the West Indies, and whites occasionally looked the other way when such creoles passed into the dominant caste. But even when the planters did not grant legal freedom, they usually assured the elevated standing of their mulatto scions by training them for artisan trades or placing them in household positions. If the countryside was "blackened" by African imports, Charles Town and the other lowcountry ports exhibited a *mélange* of "colored" peoples.⁴²

While one branch of black society stood so close to whites that its members

⁴¹ *South Carolina Gazette*, May 24, 1773, as quoted in Duncan, "Servitude and Slavery in Colonial South Carolina," 234; Leowald, *et al.*, "Bolzius Answers a Questionnaire on Carolina and Georgia," 236; Cooper and McCord, *Statutes at Large of South Carolina*, 7: 396-412; and Duncan, "Servitude and Slavery in Colonial South Carolina," 233-37.

⁴² Winthrop D. Jordan, *White over Black: American Attitudes toward the Negro* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1968), 144-50, 167-78, and "American Chiaroscuro: The Status and Definition of Mulattoes in the British Colonies," 186-200; Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina*, 100-03; and General Tax, Receipts and Payments, 1761-69, Records of the Public Treasurers of South Carolina, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia (I am grateful to Peter H. Wood for telling me about these records). A sample of manumissions taken from the South Carolina records between 1729 and 1776 indicates that two-thirds of the slaves

sometimes disappeared into the white population, most plantation slaves remained alienated from the world of their masters, physically and culturally. Living in large units often numbering in the hundreds on plantations that they had carved out of the malarial swamps and working under the direction of black drivers, the black majority gained only fleeting knowledge of Anglo-American culture. What they knew did not encourage them to learn more. Instead, they strove to widen the distance between themselves and their captors. In doing so, they too built upon the large degree of autonomy black people had earlier enjoyed.

In the pioneer period, many masters required slaves to raise their own provisions. Slaves regularly kept small gardens and tended barnyard fowl to maintain themselves, and they often marketed their surplus. Blacks kept these prerogatives with the development of the plantation system. In fact, the growth of lowcountry towns, the increasing specialization in staple production, and the comparative absence of nonslaveholding whites enlarged the market for slave-grown produce. Planters, of course, disliked the independence truck gardening afforded plantation blacks and the tendency of slaves to confuse their owners' produce with their own, but the ease of water transportation and the absence of white supervision made it difficult to prevent.

To keep their slaves on the plantation, some planters traded directly with their bondsmen, bartering manufactured goods for slave produce. Henry Laurens, a planter who described himself as a "factor" for his slaves, exchanged some "very gay Wastcoats which some of the Negro Men may want" for grain at "10 Bushels per Wastcoat." Later, learning that a plantation under his supervision was short of provisions, he authorized the overseer "to purchase of your own Negroes all that you know Lawfully belongs to themselves at the lowest price they will sell it for." As Laurens's notation suggests, planters found benefits in slave participation in the lowcountry's internal economy, but the small profits gained by bartering with their bondsmen only strengthened the slaves' customary right to their garden and barnyard fowl. Early in the nineteenth century, when Charles C. Pinckney decided to produce his own provisions, he purchased breeding stock from his slaves. By the Civil War, lowland slaves controlled considerable personal property—flocks of ducks, pigs, milch cows, and occasionally horses—often the product of stock that had been in their families for generations.⁴³ For the most part, slave propertyholding remained small during the eighteenth century. But it helped insulate plantation blacks from the harsh con-

freed were female and one-third of the slaves freed were mulattoes at a time when the slave population of South Carolina was disproportionately male and black; Duncan, "Servitude and Slavery in Colonial South Carolina," 395–98.

⁴³ Laurens, *Papers of Henry Laurens*, 4: 616, 5: 20, 41; C. C. Pinckney, Plantation Journal, 1812, and George Lucas to Charles Pinckney, January 30, 1745/46, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; Entries in Memo Book "per self" and "Negro Esquire per self," Cameron Family Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; Charles Town Grand Jury Presentment, January 1772, South Carolina Department of Archives and History; and Depositions from Liberty County, Georgia, Southern Claims Commission, Third Auditor, General Accounting Office, RG 217, National Archives, Washington, D.C. A similar division of labor between master and slave has been found in various nineteenth-century African slave societies. Whether these similar patterns have a common root or are the product of independent development is a subject for future research. See Paul O. Lovejoy, "The Characteristics of Plantations in the Nineteenth-Century Sokoto Caliphate (Islamic West Africa)," *AHR*, 84 (1979): 1283–84. Also see footnote 19, above.

ditions of primitive rice production and provided social distance from their masters' domination.

The task system, a mode of work organization peculiar to the lowcountry, further strengthened black autonomy. Under the task system, a slave's daily routine was sharply defined: so many rows of rice to be sowed, so much grain to be threshed, or so many lines of canal to be cleared. Such a precise definition of work suggests that city-bound planters found it almost impossible to keep their slaves in the fields from sunup to sundown. With little direct white supervision, slaves and their black foremen conspired to preserve a large portion of the day for their own use, while meeting their masters' minimum work requirements. Struggle over the definition of a task doubtless continued throughout the formative years of the lowcountry plantation system and after, but by the end of the century certain lines had been drawn. Slaves generally left the field sometime in the early afternoon, a practice that protected them from the harsh afternoon sun and allowed them time to tend their own gardens and stock.⁴⁴ Like participation in the lowcountry's internal economy, the task system provided slaves with a large measure of control over their own lives.

The autonomy generated by both the task system and truck gardening provided the material basis for lowland black culture. Within the confines of the overwhelmingly black countryside, African culture survived well. The continual arrival of Africans into the lowcountry renewed and refreshed slave knowledge of West African life. In such a setting blacks could hardly lose their past. The distinctive pattern of the lowland slave trade, moreover, heightened the impact of the newly arrived Africans on the evolution of black culture. While slaves dribbled into the North through a multiplicity of ports, they poured into the lowcountry through a single city. The large, uncentered slave trade and the large slaveholding units assured the survival not only of the common denominators of West African culture but also many of its particular tribal and national forms. Planter preferences or perhaps the chance ascendancy of one group sometimes allowed specific African cultures to reconstitute themselves within the plantation setting. To be sure, Africans changed in the lowcountry. Even where blacks enjoyed numerical superiority and a considerable degree of auton-

⁴⁴ By the middle of the nineteenth century, the work required under the task system had been carefully defined. Indeed, for many lowcountry crops, the task had become so standardized that it was often used interchangeably as a unit of land (the amount necessary to grow a task of peas) or even a unit of time (the amount of time it took to plant a task of peas). Nevertheless, the struggle over the definition of the task did not end. Following emancipation, when planters attempted to eliminate the task system, freed people objected, often violently. In 1865, a Union soldier reported from Georgetown that the freedmen "have been accustomed to working by task, which has always given them leisure to cultivate land for themselves, tend their stock, and amuse themselves, and, therefore very correctly, I think, [believe] that with such a change in the march of labor all their privileges will go and their condition will be less to their taste than it was when they were slaves." Lt. Col. A. J. Willard to Capt. George H. Hooker, Georgetown, November 7, 1865, Letters Sent, vol. 156 DS, U.S. Army Commands, RG 393, pt. 2, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Also see Ulrich B. Phillips, ed., *Plantation and Frontier*, 1 (Cleveland, 1909): 115-19; and Frederick Law Olmsted, *The Cotton Kingdom*, ed. Arthur M. Schlesinger, 1 (New York, 1953): 190-94. The origins of the task system and the struggle over the definition of work in the eighteenth century has not yet been investigated, but, for the kinds of disputes that defined the measure of a task, see Josiah Smith to George Austin, July 22, 1773, Josiah Smith Letterbook, Southern Historical Collection, and Richard Hutson to Mr. Croll, "per Caser," August 22, 1767, Charles W. Hutson Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill.

omy, they could no more transport their culture unchanged than could their masters. But lowcountry blacks incorporated more of West African culture—as reflected in their language, religion, work patterns, and much else—into their new lives than did other black Americans. Throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth, lowcountry blacks continued to work the land, name their children, and communicate through word and song in a manner that openly combined African traditions with the circumstances of plantation life.⁴⁵

The new pattern of creolization that developed following the rice revolution smashed the emerging homogeneity of black life in the first years of settlement and left lowcountry blacks deeply divided. One branch of black culture evolved in close proximity to whites. Urban, often skilled, well-traveled, and increasingly American-born, creoles knew white society well, and they used their knowledge to better themselves. Some, clearly a well-connected minority, pressed for incorporation into the white world. They urged missionary groups to admit their children to school and later petitioned lawmakers to allow their testimony in court, carefully adding that they did not expect full equality with whites.⁴⁶ Plantation slaves shared few of the assimilationist aspirations of urban creoles. By their dress, language, and work routine, they lived in a world apart. Rather than demand incorporation into white society, they yearned only to be left alone. Within the quarter, aided by their numerical dominance, their plantation-based social hierarchy, and their continued contact with Africa, they developed their own distinctive culture, different not only from that of whites but also from the cosmopolitan world of their Afro-American brethren. To be sure, there were connections between the black majority and the urban creoles. Many—market women, jobbing artisans, and boatmen—moved easily between these two worlds, and most blacks undoubtedly learned something of the other world through chance encounters, occasional visits, and word of mouth.⁴⁷ Common white oppression continually shrank the social distance that the distinctive experience created, but by the eve of the Revolution, deep cultural differences separated those blacks who sought to improve their lives through incorporation into the white world and those who determined to disregard the white man's ways. If the movement from African to creole obliterated cultural differences among Northern blacks, creolization fractured black society in the lowcountry.

CULTURAL DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN AFRICANS AND AFRO-AMERICANS developed in the Chesapeake as well, although the dimension of differences between African and creole tended to be time rather than space. Unlike in the lowcountry, white

⁴⁵ Wood, *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina*, esp. chap. 6; Lorenzo D. Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (Chicago, 1949); William R. Bascom, "Acculturation among the Gullah Negroes," *American Anthropologist*, 43 (1941): 43–50; Klingberg, *An Appraisal of the Negro in South Carolina*; and Hennig Cohen, "Slave Names in Colonial South Carolina," *American Speech*, 28 (1952): 102–07.

⁴⁶ Klingberg, *An Appraisal of the Negro in Colonial South Carolina*, 116–17; and Petition of John and William Morriss, 1791, and Petition from Camden Negroes, 1793, South Carolina Legislative Papers, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia.

⁴⁷ For one planter's attempt to keep boatmen from mixing with his plantation hands, see Laurens, *Papers of Henry Laurens*, 4: 319, 633; and Sellers, *Charleston Business on the Eve of the American Revolution*, 108.

planters did not promote the creation of a distinctive group whose origins, function, and physical appearance distinguished them from the mass of plantation slaves and offered them hope, however faint, of eventual incorporation into white society. And, compared to the North, African immigration into the Chesapeake came relatively early in the process of cultural transformation. As a result, African-creole differences disappeared with time and a single, unified Afro-American culture slowly emerged in the Chesapeake.

As in the lowcountry, little distinguished black and white laborers during the early years of settlement. Most of the first blacks brought into the Chesapeake region were West Indian creoles who bore English or Spanish surnames and carried records of baptism. Along the James, as along the Cooper, the demands of pioneer life at times operated to strengthen the slaves' bargaining position. Some blacks set the condition of their labor, secured their family life, participated in the region's internal economy, and occasionally bartered for their liberty. This, of course, did not save most black people from the brutal exploitation that almost all propertyless men and women faced as planters squeezed the last pound of profit from the tobacco economy. The blacks' treatment at the hands of planters differed little from that of white bound labor in large measure because it was difficult to treat people more brutally.⁴⁸ While the advantages of this peculiar brand of equality may have been lost on its beneficiaries, those blacks who were able to complete their terms of servitude quickly joined whites in the mad scramble for land, servants, and status.

Many did well. During the seventeenth century, black freemen could be found throughout the region owning land, holding servants, and occasionally attaining minor offices. Like whites, they accumulated property, sued their neighbors, and passed their estates to their children. In 1651, Anthony Johnson, the best known of these early Negro freemen, received a two-hundred-and-fifty-acre headright for importing five persons into Virginia. John Johnson, a neighbor and probably a relative, did even better, earning five hundred and fifty acres for bringing eleven persons into the colony. Both men owned substantial farms on the Eastern Shore, held servants, and left their heirs sizable estates. As established members of their communities, they enjoyed the rights of citizens. When a servant claiming his freedom fled Anthony Johnson's plantation and took refuge with a nearby white farmer, Johnson took his neighbor to court and won the return of his servant along with damages against the white man.⁴⁹

The class rather than racial basis of early Chesapeake society enabled many black men to compete successfully for that scarcest of all New World commodities: the affection of white women. Bastardy lists indicate that white female servants ignored the strictures against what white lawmakers labeled "shame-

⁴⁸ Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1975), 108–79, 215–49; and Wesley Frank Craven, *White, Red, and Black: The Seventeenth-Century Virginian* (Charlottesville, Va., 1971), 75–99.

⁴⁹ Ross M. Kimmel, "Free Blacks in Seventeenth-Century Maryland," *Maryland Historical Magazine*, 71 (1976): 19–25; John H. Russell, *The Free Negro in Virginia, 1619–1865* (Baltimore, 1913), 24–38, 88, 116, 119–20, 136–37; James H. Brewer, "Negro Property Owners in Seventeenth-Century Virginia," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 12 (1955): 575–80; and Susie M. Ames, *Studies of the Virginia Eastern Shore in the Seventeenth Century* (Richmond, Va., 1940), 99–108.

ful” and “unnatural” acts and joined together with men of their own condition regardless of color. Fragmentary evidence from various parts of seventeenth-century Virginia reveals that approximately one-quarter to one-third of the bastard children born to white women were mulattoes. The commonplace nature of these interracial unions might have been the reason why one justice legally sanctified the marriage of Hester, an English servant woman, to James Tate, a black slave. Some successful, property-owning whites and blacks also intermarried. In Virginia’s Northampton county, Francis Payne, a Negro freeman, married a white woman, who later remarried a white man after Payne’s death. William Greensted, a white attorney who represented Elizabeth Key, a mulatto woman, in her successful suit for her freedom, later married her. In 1691, when the Virginia General Assembly finally ruled against the practice, some propertied whites found the legislation novel and obnoxious enough to muster a protest.⁵⁰

By the middle of the seventeenth century, Negro freemen sharing and fulfilling the same ideals and aspirations that whites held were no anomaly in the Chesapeake region. An Eastern Shore tax list of 1668 counted nearly a third of black tithables free. If most blacks did not escape the tightening noose of enslavement, they continued to live and work under conditions not much different from white servants. Throughout the seventeenth and into the first decades of the eighteenth century, black and white servants ran away together, slept together, and, upon occasion, stood shoulder to shoulder against the weighty champions of established authority. Thus viewed from the first years of settlement—the relatively small number of blacks, their creole origins, and the initial success of some in establishing a place in society—black acculturation in the Chesapeake appeared to be following the nonplantation pattern of the Northern colonies and the pioneer lowcountry.⁵¹

THE emergence of a planter class and its consolidation of power during a series of political crises in the middle years of the seventeenth century transformed black life in the Chesapeake and threatened this pattern of cultural change. Following the legalization of slavery in the 1660s, black slaves slowly but steadily replaced white indentured servants as the main source of plantation labor. By 1700, blacks made up more than half the agricultural work force in Virginia and, since the great planters could best afford to purchase slaves, blacks composed an even larger share of the workers on the largest estates. Increased reliance on slave labor quickly outstripped West Indian supplies. Beginning in the

⁵⁰ Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom*, 329–37; Warren M. Billings, “The Cases of Fernando and Elizabeth Key: A Note on the Status of Blacks in the Seventeenth Century,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 30 (1973): 467–74; and Kimmel, “Free Blacks in Seventeenth-Century Maryland,” 20–21.

⁵¹ Edmund S. Morgan, “Slavery and Freedom: The American Paradox,” *Journal of American History*, 59 (1972): 17–18; and T. H. Breen, “A Changing Labor Force and Race Relations in Virginia, 1660–1710,” *Journal of Social History*, 7 (1973): 3–25. The confused, uncertain status of black people generally and of free blacks in particular during the seventeenth century also indicates the unwillingness, inability, or, more probably, lack of interest on the part of whites in firmly fixing the status of blacks. For the farrago of legislation governing free blacks, see Ira Berlin, *Slaves without Masters: The Free Negro in the Antebellum South* (New York, 1974), 7–9; and Jordan, *White over Black*, 136–78. The status of blacks, free or slave, has become something of a historical perennial, with scholars agreeing that before the 1660s at least some blacks were free and some were slave and the precise status of most is simply impossible to determine. For a review of the evidence, see Jordan, *White over Black*, chap. 2.

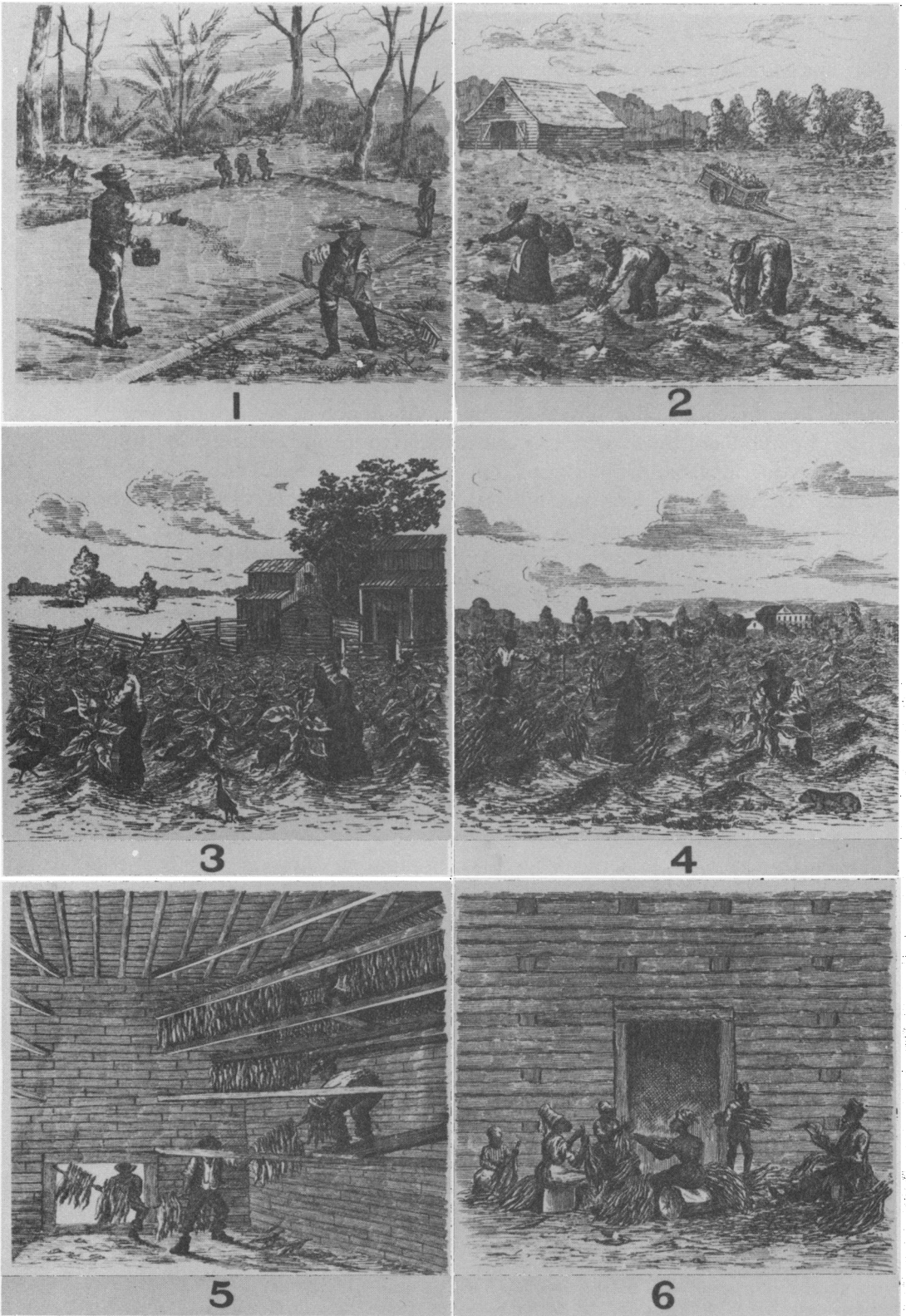


Figure 2: Late nineteenth-century representation of the stages of prerevolutionary tobacco production. 1: Sowing and hilling. 2: Transplanting. 3: Laying by, topping, worming, and suckering. 4: Cutting and sticking. 5: Housing. 6: Stripping and tying. Photograph taken from Benjamin Butterworth, *The Growth of Industrial Art* (Washington, 1892), 192.

1680s, Africans entered the region in increasingly large numbers. The proportion of blacks born in Africa grew steadily throughout the waning years of the seventeenth century, so that by the first decade of the eighteenth century, Africans composed some three-quarters of the region's blacks.⁵² Unlike the low-country, African imports never threatened the Chesapeake's overall white numerical superiority, but by the beginning of the eighteenth century they dominated black society. Some eighty years after the first blacks arrived at Jamestown and some forty years after the legalization of slavery, African importation profoundly transformed black life.

Slave conditions deteriorated as their numbers increased. With an eye for a quick profit, planters in the Chesapeake imported males disproportionately. Generally men outnumbered women more than two to one on Chesapeake slavers. Wildly imbalanced sex ratios undermined black family life. Physically spent and emotionally drained by the rigors of the Middle Passage, African women had few children. Thus, as in the North and the Carolina lowlands, the black birth rate fell and mortality rate surged upward with the commencement of direct African importation.⁵³

The hard facts of life and death in the Chesapeake region distinguished creoles and Africans at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The demands of the tobacco economy enlarged these differences in several ways. Generally, planters placed little trust in newly arrived Africans with their strange tongues and alien customs. While they assigned creoles to artisanal duties on their plantations and to service within their households, they sent Africans to the distant, upland quarters where the slaves did the dull, backbreaking work of clearing the land and tending tobacco. The small size of these specialized upcountry units, their isolation from the mainstream of Chesapeake life, and their rude frontier conditions made these largely male compounds lonely, unhealthy places that narrowed men's vision. The dynamics of creole life, however, broadened black understanding of life in the New World. Traveling freely through the countryside as artisans, watermen, and domestic servants, creoles gained in confidence as they mastered the terrain, perfected their English, and learned about Christianity and other cultural modes that whites equated with civilization. Knowledge of the white world enabled black creoles to manipulate their masters to their own advantage. If Afro-Americans became increasingly knowledgeable about their circumstances and confident of their ability to deal with them, Africans remained provincials, limited by the narrow alternatives of plantation life.⁵⁴

⁵² Allan Kulikoff, "A 'Prolifick' People: Black Population Growth in the Chesapeake Colonies, 1700-1790," *Southern Studies*, 16 (1977): 391-96, 403-05, and "The Origins of Afro-American Society in Tidewater Maryland and Virginia, 1700 to 1790," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 35 (1978): 229-31; Russell R. Menard, "The Maryland Slave Population, 1658 to 1730: A Demographic Profile of Blacks in Four Counties," *ibid.*, 32 (1975): 30-32; and Craven, *White, Red, and Black*, 89-103. Herbert S. Klein has maintained that West Indian re-exports remained the majority into the first two decades of the eighteenth century; see his "Slaves and Shipping in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 5 (1975): 384-85.

⁵³ Kulikoff, "A 'Prolifick' People: Black Population Growth," 392-406; Menard, "The Maryland Slave Population," 30-35, 38-49; and Craven, *White, Red, and Black*, 98-101.

⁵⁴ Gerald W. Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New York, 1972), esp. chaps. 2-3; Menard, "The Maryland Slave Population," 32-54; and Kulikoff, "Origins of Afro-American Society in Tidewater Maryland and Virginia," 236-49.

As in the lowcountry and the Northern colonies, Africans in the Chesapeake strove to escape whites, while creoles used their knowledge of white society for their own benefit. These cultural differences, which were reflected in all aspects of black life, can be seen most clearly in the diverse patterns of resistance. Africans ran away toward the back country and isolated swamps. They generally moved in groups that included women and children, despite the hazards such groups entailed for a successful escape. Their purpose was to recreate the only society they knew free from white domination. In 1727, Governor William Gooch of Virginia reported that about a dozen slaves had left a new plantation near the falls of the James River. They headed west and settled near Lexington, built houses, and planted a crop before being retaken. But Afro-Americans ran away alone, usually with the hope of escaping into American society. Moving toward the areas of heaviest settlement, they found refuge in the thick network of black kinship that covered the countryside and sold their labor to white yeomen with few questions asked. While the possibility of passing as free remained small in the years before the Revolution, the creoles' obvious confidence in their ability to integrate themselves into American society stands in stark contrast to that of Africans, who sought first to flee it.⁵⁵

As reflected in the mode of resistance, place of residence, occupation, and much else, Africans and creoles developed distinctive patterns of behavior and belief. To a degree, whites recognized these differences. They stigmatized Africans as "outlandish" and noted how creoles "affect our language, habits, and customs." They played on African-creole differences to divide blacks from each other, and they utilized creole skills to maximize the benefits of slave labor. But this recognition did not elevate creoles over Africans in any lasting way. Over the course of the century following legal enslavement, it had precisely the opposite effect. Chesapeake planters consolidated their class position by asserting white racial unity. In this context, the entry of large numbers of African—as opposed to creole—blacks into the region enlarged racial differences and helped secure planter domination. Thus, as reliance on black labor increased, the opportunities for any black—no matter how fluent in English or conversant with the countryside—to escape bondage and join the scramble for land, servants, and status diminished steadily.

By the middle of the eighteenth century, the size and character of the free Negro population had been significantly altered. Instead of a large minority of the black population, Negro freemen now composed just a small proportion of all blacks, probably not more than 5 percent. Many were cripples and old folks whom planters discarded when they could no longer wring a profit from their labor. While most were of mixed racial origins, few of these free mulattoes of the Chesapeake, in contrast to those of the lowcountry, traced their ancestry to the planter class. Instead, they descended from white servants, frequently women. These impoverished people had little status to offer their children. Indeed, planter-inspired legislation further compromised their liberty by requiring that

⁵⁵ Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*, 34–110, esp. table 3 (pp. 108–09); and Kulikoff, "Origins of Afro-American Society in Tidewater Maryland and Virginia," 253–54.

the offspring of white women and black men serve their mother's master for thirty-one years. Those who survived the term could scarcely hope for the opportunities an earlier generation of Negro freemen had enjoyed.⁵⁶ The transformation of the free Negro caste in the century between 1660 and 1760 measured the change in Chesapeake society as its organizing principle changed from class to race.

The free Negro's decline reveals how the racial imperatives of Chesapeake society operated to lump all black people together, free and slave, creole and African. In the Chesapeake, planters dared not grant creoles special status at the expense of Africans. Since the Africans would shortly be creoles and since creoles shared so much with whites, distinctions among blacks threatened the racial division that underlay planter domination. In the lowcountry, where geography, economy, and language separated white and black, those few blacks who spoke, dressed, acted, and looked like whites might be allowed some white prerogatives. But, if lowcountry planters could argue that no white man could do the work required to grow rice commercially, no one in the Chesapeake could reasonably deny that whites could grow tobacco. The fundamental unity of Chesapeake life and the long-term instability of African-creole differences pushed blacks together in the white mind and in fact.

During the middle years of the eighteenth century, changes in the Chesapeake economy and society further diminished differences within black society and created a unified Afro-American culture. The success of the tobacco economy enlarged the area of settlement and allowed planters to increase their holdings. The most successful planters, anxious to protect themselves from the rigors of the world marketplace, strove for plantation self-sufficiency. The great estates of the Chesapeake became self-contained enterprises with slaves taking positions as artisans, tradesmen, wagoners, and, sometimes, managers; the plantation was "like a Town," as a tutor on Robert Carter's estate observed, "but most of the Inhabitants are black." The increased sophistication of the Chesapeake economy propelled many more blacks into artisanal positions and the larger units of production, tighter pattern of settlement, and the greater mobility allowed by the growing network of roads ended the deadening isolation of the upcountry quarter. Bondsmen increasingly lived in large groups, and those who did not could generally find black companionship within a few miles' walk. Finally, better food, clothing, and shelter and, perhaps, the development of immunities to New World diseases enabled blacks to live longer, healthier lives.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Hugh Jones, *The Present State of Virginia* (1724), ed. Richard L. Morton (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1956), 75; Berlin, *Slaves without Masters*, 3-6; Donald L. Horowitz, "Color Differentiation in the American Systems of Slavery," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 3 (1973): 526-30; and George M. Fredrickson, "Toward a Social Interpretation of the Development of American Racism," in Nathan I. Huggins et al., eds., *Key Issues in the Afro-American Experience*, 1 (New York, 1971): 246-47.

⁵⁷ Philip V. Fithian, *The Journal and Letters of Philip Vickers Fithian, 1773-1774*, ed. Hunter D. Farish (Williamsburg, Va., 1943), 73; Mullin, *Flight and Resistance: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*, 19-32; Kulikoff, "Origins of Afro-American Society in Tidewater Maryland and Virginia," 240-42, 246-49; Louis Morton, *Robert Carter of Nomini Hall: A Virginia Tobacco Planter of the Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville, Va., 1941); Michael Greenberg, "William Byrd II and the World of the Market," *Southern Studies*, 16 (1977): 429-56; and, especially, Landon Carter, *The Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, 1752-1778*, ed. Jack P. Greene, 2 vols. (Charlottesville, Va., 1966), *passim*.

As part of their drive for self-sufficiency, Chesapeake slaveholders encouraged the development of an indigenous slave population. Spurred by the proven ability of Africans to survive and reproduce and pressed in the international slave market by the superior resources of West Indian sugar magnates and lowland rice growers, Chesapeake planters strove to correct the sexual imbalance within the black population, perhaps by importing a large proportion of women or lessening the burden of female slaves. Blacks quickly took advantage of this new circumstance and placed their family life on a firmer footing. Husbands and wives petitioned their owners to allow them to reside together on the same quarter and saw to it that their families were fed, beyond their masters' rations. Planters, for their part, were usually receptive to slaves' demands for a secure family life, both because it reflected their own values and because they profited mightily from the addition of slave children. Thomas Jefferson frankly considered "a woman who brings a child every two years as more profitable than the best man on the farm [for] what she produces is an addition to capital, while his labor disappears in mere consumption." Under these circumstances, the black population increased rapidly. Planters relied less and less on African importation and, by the 1740s, most of the growth of the black population came from natural increase. Within a generation, African importation was, for all practical purposes, no longer a significant source of slave labor. In the early 1770s, the period of the greatest importation into the lowcountry, only five hundred of the five thousand slaves added annually to the black population of Virginia derived directly from Africa.⁵⁸

The establishment of the black family marked the re-emergence of Afro-American culture in the Chesapeake. Although Africans continued to enter the region, albeit at a slower pace, the nature of the slave trade minimized their impact on the development of black society in the region. Unlike those in the lowcountry, newly arrived Africans could rarely hope to remain together. Rather than funnel their cargo through a single port, Chesapeake slavers peddled it in small lots at the many tobacco landings that lined the bay's extensive perimeter. Planters rarely bought more than a few slaves at a time, and larger purchasers, usually the great planter-merchants, often acted as jobbers, quickly reselling these slaves to backcountry freeholders.⁵⁹ The resulting fragmentation sent

⁵⁸ Allan Kulikoff, "The Beginnings of the Afro-American Family in Maryland," in Aubrey C. Land *et al.*, eds., *Law, Society, and Politics in Early Maryland* (Baltimore, 1977), 177–96, "A 'Prolifick' People: Black Population Growth," 401–03, 405–14, and "Origins of Afro-American Society in Tidewater Maryland and Virginia," 246–53; Daniel Dulany to Robert Carter, December 18, 1768, Colonial Papers, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore; Robert Carter to John Pound, March 16, 1779, to Fleet Cox, January 2, 1788, and to George Newman, December 29, 1789, typescript, Robert Carter Papers, Duke University, Durham, N.C.; John C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, 39 vols. (Washington, 1931–44), 2: 526, 29: 154, 398; and Edwin M. Betts, ed., *Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book* (New York, 1953), pt. 2: 46, 12–13, 21, 24–26, 42–46. Planters also found a relationship between family stability and social stability. A Maryland planter instructed his overseer about a returned fugitive: "While his wife continues at home, I suppose there will be no danger of his making a second attempt to get off. You may let him know, that his pardon depends upon his good future behavior, that if he behaves well, and endeavours to make amends for his past behavior I will when I return purchase his wife if her master will sell her at a reasonable price." Letter of John Hanson, January 29, 1782, John Hanson Papers, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.

⁵⁹ Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*, 14–16; Kulikoff, "Origins of Afro-American Society in Tidewater Maryland and Virginia," 230–35; Darold D. Wax, "Black Immigrants: The

newly arrived Africans in all directions and prevented the maintenance of tribal or shipboard ties. Chesapeake slaveholders cared little about the origins of their slaves. In their eyes, newly arrived Africans were not Iboes, Coromantees, or Angolans, but “new Negroes.” While the uncentered slave trade sustained and strengthened African culture in the lowcountry, the Chesapeake slave trade facilitated the absorption of Africans into the evolving creole society.

Differences between creoles and Africans did not disappear with the creation of a self-sustaining Afro-American population. The creoles’ advantages—language skills, familiarity with the countryside, artisanal standing, and knowledge of the plantation routine—continued to propel them into positions of authority within the slave hierarchy. In some ways, the growing complexity of the Chesapeake economy widened the distance between Africans and creoles, at least at first. Most of the skilled and managerial positions within the region’s expanding iron industry went to creole blacks as did the artisanal work in flour mills and weaving houses. On some plantations, moreover, artisan and house status became lodged in particular families with parents passing privileged positions on to their children. Increasingly, skilled slaves entered the market economy by selling their own time and earning money from “overwork,” thereby gaining a large measure of freedom. For the most part, Africans remained on rude, backwoods plantations tending the broad-leaf weed. Since creole slaves sold at a premium price and most great planters had already established self-sustaining slave forces, small planters purchased nearly all of the newly arrived Africans after mid-century. These upward-striving men generally owned the least developed, most distant farms. Their labor requirements remained primitive compared to the sophisticated division of labor on the self-contained plantation-towns.⁶⁰

Over the long term, however, economic changes sped the integration of Africans into Afro-American society. Under the pressure of a world-wide food shortage, Chesapeake planters turned from the production of tobacco to that of foodstuff, especially wheat. The demands of wheat cultivation transformed the nature of labor in the region. Whereas tobacco farming required season-long labor, wheat farming employed workers steadily only during planting and harvesting. The remainder of the year, laborers had little to do with the crop. At the same time, however, wheat required a larger and more skilled labor force to transport the grain to market and to store it, mill it, and reship it as flour, bread, or bulk grain. Economic changes encouraged masters to teach their slaves skills and to hire them out during the slack season. At first, these opportunities went mostly to creoles, but as the wheat economy grew, spurring urbanization and manufacturing, the demands for artisans and hirelings outstripped the creole

Slave Trade in Colonial Maryland,” *Maryland Magazine of History*, 73 (1978): 30–45; and Winthrop D. Jordan, “Planter and Slave Identity Formation: Some Problems in the Comparative Approach,” in Rubin and Tuden, *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies*, 38.

⁶⁰ Kulikoff, “The Beginnings of the Afro-American Family in Maryland,” 185–86; Jordan, *White over Black*, 405 n. 7; Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*, 83–139; “Description of Servants, 1772,” Northampton Furnace, Ridgely Account Books, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore; and Ronald L. Lewis, *Coal, Iron, and Slaves: Industrial Slavery in Maryland and Virginia, 1715–1865* (Westport, Conn., 1979), 82–84, 162–63.

population.⁶¹ An increasing number of Africans were placed in positions previously reserved for creoles. The process of cultural transformation that earlier in the eighteenth century had taken a generation or more was considerably shorter at mid-century. Africans became Afro-Americans with increasing rapidity as the century wore on, eliminating the differences within black society that African importation had created.

Chesapeake blacks enjoyed considerably less autonomy than their lowcountry counterparts. Resident planters, small units of production, and the presence of large numbers of whites meant that most blacks lived and worked in close proximity to whites. While lowcountry planters fled to coastal cities for a large part of the year, the resident planter was a fixture of Chesapeake life. Small freeholders labored alongside slaves, and great planters prided themselves on regulating all aspects of their far-flung estates through a combination of direct personal supervision and plantation-based overseers. The latter were usually white, drawn from the region's white majority. Those few blacks who achieved managerial positions, moreover, enjoyed considerably less authority than lowland drivers. The presence of numerous nonslaveholding whites circumscribed black opportunities in other ways as well. While Chesapeake slaves commonly kept gardens and flocks of barnyard animals, white competitors limited their market and created a variety of social tensions. If lowcountry masters sometimes encouraged their slaves to produce nonstaple garden crops, whites in the Chesapeake—slaveholders and nonslaveholders alike—complained that blacks stole more than they raised and worked to curb the practice. Thus, at every turn, economy and society conspired to constrain black autonomy.

The requirements of tobacco cultivation reinforced the planters' concern about daily work routine. Whereas the task system insulated lowcountry blacks against white intervention and maximized black control over their work, the constant attention demanded by tobacco impelled Chesapeake planters to oversee the tedious process of cultivating, topping, worming, suckering, and curing tobacco. The desire of Chesapeake masters to control their slaves went beyond the supervision of labor. Believing that slaves depended on them "for every necessity of life," they intervened in the most intimate aspects of black life. "I hope you will take care that the Negroes both men and women I sent you up last always go by the names we gave them," Robert "King" Carter reminded his steward. "I am sure we repeated them so often . . . that everyone knew their names & would readily answer to them." Chesapeake planters sought to shape domestic

⁶¹ Carville Earle and Ronald Hoffman, "The Urban South: The First Two Centuries," *Perspectives in American History*, 10 (1976): 26–76; Mullin, *Flight and Rebellion: Slave Resistance in Eighteenth-Century Virginia*, 87–88, 124–27; and Gray, *Agriculture in the Southern United States*, 2: 602–17. Although the best study of slave hiring in the Chesapeake region focuses on the post-Revolution years, the forces promoting slave hire after the war suggest that the practice predates the Revolution. See Sarah S. Hughes, "Slaves for Hire: The Allocation of Black Labor in Elizabeth City County, Virginia, 1782 to 1810," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 35 (1978): 260–86. Also see Robert Carter to Warner Lewis, October 16, 1773, and October 20, 1774, to Mrs. Corbin, September 27, 1775, to Griffin Garland, September 29, 1775, and to John Ballantine, July 7, 1777, Carter Papers, typescript, Duke University, Durham, N.C. Allan Kulikoff has estimated that the proportion of blacks working as agricultural laborers dropped from 90 to 82 percent between 1733 and 1776; see his "Tobacco and Slaves: Population, Economy, and Society in Eighteenth-Century Prince George's County, Maryland" (Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1976), 235–39.

relations, cure physical maladies, and form personalities. However miserably they failed to ensure black domestic tranquility and reform slave drunkards, paternalism at close quarters in the Chesapeake had a far more potent influence on black life than the distant paternalism that developed in the lowcountry. Chesapeake blacks developed no distinct language and rarely utilized African day names for their children.⁶² Afro-American culture in the Chesapeake evolved parallel with Anglo-American culture and with a considerable measure of congruence.

THE DIVERSE DEVELOPMENT OF AFRO-AMERICAN CULTURE during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries reveals the importance of time and place in the study of American slavery. Black people in colonial America shared many things: a common African lineage, a common racial oppressor, a common desire to create the richest life possible for themselves and their posterity in the most difficult of circumstances. But these commonalities took different shape and meaning within the diverse circumstances of the North American mainland. The nature of the slave trade, the various demographic configurations of whites and blacks, and the demands of particular staples—to name some of the factors influencing the development of slave society—created at least three distinctive patterns of Afro-American life. Perhaps a finer analysis will reveal still others.

This diversity did not end with the American Revolution. While African-creole differences slowly disappeared as the centerpole of black society with the closing of the slave trade and the steady growth of an Afro-American population, other sources of cohesion and division came to the fore.⁶³ Differences between freemen and bondsmen, urban and rural folk, skilled and unskilled workers, and browns and blacks united and divided black people, and made black society every bit as variable and diverse during the nineteenth century as in the eighteenth. Indeed the diversity of black life increased substantially during the antebellum years as political changes abolished slavery in some places and strengthened it in others, as demographic changes set in motion by the Great Migration across the Lower South took effect, as the introduction of new crops enlarged the South's repertoire of staples, and as the kaleidoscopic movement of the world market sent the American economy in all directions.

⁶² Robert Carter to Robert Jones, Robert "King" Carter Letterbooks, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville (I am grateful to Emory Evans for alerting me to this letter); and Robert Carter to William Carr, March 15, 1785, Carter Papers, typescript, Duke University, Durham, N.C. Also see Carter, *Diary of Colonel Landon Carter of Sabine Hall, passim*; Robert Carter to his various stewards and overseers (Rubin Sanford, Clement Brooke, Newyear Branson), Carter Papers, typescript, Duke University, Durham, N.C.; Fitzpatrick, *The Writings of George Washington*, esp. vols. 32–34; Depositions of James Holland, William Ferguson, and Charles Gardiner, August 23, 1793, Lloyd Family Papers, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore; and Betts, *Thomas Jefferson's Farm Book*, pt. 2: 16. For the striking difference in naming patterns of Chesapeake and lowcountry bondsmen, compare the slave lists in the Charles Carroll Account Book, Maryland Hall of Records, Annapolis, and the Charles C. Pinckney Plantation Journal, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁶³ For the importance of African-creole differences in understanding black reactions to the revolutionary crises of the last quarter of the eighteenth century, see Michael Mullin, "British Caribbean and North American Slaves in an Era of War and Revolution, 1775–1807," in Jeffrey J. Crow and Larry E. Tise, eds., *The Southern Experience in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1978), 235–67.

If slave society during the colonial era can be comprehended only through a careful delineation of temporal and spatial differences among Northern, Chesapeake, and lowcountry colonies, a similar division will be necessary for a full understanding of black life in nineteenth-century America. The actions of black people during the American Revolution, the Civil War, and the long years of bondage between these two cataclysmic events cannot be understood merely as a function of the dynamics of slavery or the possibilities of liberty, but must be viewed within the specific social circumstances and cultural traditions of black people. These varied from time to time and from place to place. Thus no matter how complete recent studies of black life appear, they are limited to the extent that they provide a static and singular vision of a dynamic and complex society.